



成田良悟

Ryohgo Narita

BACCANO!

バッカーノ!

1934 獄中編

Alice In Jails

電撃文庫

Written by Narita Ryohgo  
Illustrated by Enami Katsumi



The illustration features several characters from the Baccano! series. At the top left is a character with blue hair and glasses. To their right is a character with green hair. In the center, a character with long brown hair is partially visible. Below them, a character with dark hair and a green jacket is shown. In the foreground, a blonde character with blue eyes looks upwards. A blonde character in a red dress is floating in the center. In the bottom left, a small character in a green uniform is visible. A large, dark face with a yellow eye is in the background.

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イラスト●エナミカツミ

Illustration Katsumi Enami





は向いてない。二律背反する性質を持つ  
た奴ですよ」

「人生まで不器用ってこったな」

「……」

「そうだ、キー兄も何か言ってよ」

「なんだ兄貴、いたのかよ。ガハハハ」

「……あいつは、不器用だ」

「おいおい兄貴、それ今俺らが言っ……」

「……奴は自分を偽れん程に不器用だ。  
見たままのあいつが、そのまま奴の全て  
だ。俺達は何を語ろうが、全く無意味  
だ」

「ちよっ……キー兄、たまに長く喋ったと  
思ったら、僕達の長話を全部無に!?」

「ひょっとして、兄貴を無視して今まで  
話してたのを怒っ……ちよっ……解った  
悪かったよ兄貴、だからそんな怖え目で  
にら——」

（以下、凍り付くような空気が続く）





# フィロ・プロシエンツォについて――

ガンドール三兄弟思フママ語ル

「フィロですか？　どんな奴かと急に言われまして……。同じボロアパートで育った幼馴染み、としか言いようが無いですね」

「まあ、頭は良くねえわな」

「ベル兄に言われちゃお終いだよ……。まあ、頭が良くない、というよりは、不器用と言った方がしっくりきますね」

「ああ……もう4年だろ？　あのエリスとて女と一緒の家に住んでからよ」

「エリスだよ、ベル兄。……まあ、あの子に惚れてるといのは見え見えですよ。でも未だに手も握ってない。クレアじゃないですけど、本当に同じ人間なのか疑わしくなります」

「あーや、くつつくまであと50年にかかるぜ、ガハハハ」

「ただ……まあ、彼の不器用さは筋金入りですが、決して単なる内気なグズというわけではありません」

「どっちかつと、いつまでもガキみてえな熱血漢って感じだよな」

「彼は他者に対して非常に不器用です。愚直なまでにね。ですが――だからこそ、フィロは人を裏切る事もできないれば、誰かの為に泣く事も、誰かの為に悲しむ事も、誰かと共に笑う事も、そして、自らのファミリィの為に冷酷にもなれば命を投げ出す事もできる……まあ、ギャングには向いています、悪人に」

## About Firo Prochainezo

### Recollections of the Gandor Brothers

"Did you say Firo? If I had to comment about what he's like...I can only say that we grew up in the same apartment block, so he's an intimate friend."

"Well, his mind's not very nimble."

"But Berga says almost the same thing about everyone...well, but it's better to say that he's wrong-headed rather than to say he's stupid."

"Ah, has it really been four years...? He and the Alice girl's been living together for four years."

"It's 'Ennis,' Berga. She looks sort of blank. And you know, it doesn't look like they've even held hands yet. Even if they aren't vampires...do they count as humans? That's doubtful."

"If you want the two of them to act all lovey-dovey, you'd probably have to wait for another fifty years, hahaha."

"But really, he's gauche only when balancing accounts and stuff. In general he's not completely useless."

"Whatever the case, he's always going to be a baby-faced and passionate youth."

"His worldly knowledge really is lacking...so you can almost say he's kind of dumb. But – it's precisely because of this that Firo would never betray anyone. He'd feel for you, cry for you, and he'd share your happiness too. And for the sake of his clan he can also act in cold blood, even if he has to sacrifice his own life. Ah, he really suits a life of organized crime. But that's not to say he's a bad guy. He's almost like a living paradox, within himself."

"I heard he can't even hold on to his own life."

"..."

"Yeah. Keith also said something like that."

"Comon, Keith old bro, you're here too, ahaha. Say something."

"...he's really an idiot."

"Hey, Keith, didn't we just say..."

"...he's such an idiot, he's a danger to himself. Though what we see of Firo is the true Firo. What's the point of talking about all of this anyway?"

"Wait a sec... Keith, now that you've delivered your profound commentary, you've overturned everything we've said so far."

"You're just angry that we've been leaving you out of the conversation, right? Wait...I understand. Sorry, Keith. So please don't scowl at me like that, all right?"



(After this, a chilly atmosphere persisted.)

# ラッド・ルッソについて

グラハム・スペクター クルクル 狂々ト語ル

生まれたって事さ。そつだろ？」

それがラッドの兄貴の理屈さ！ 狂おしい程にハッピーに素敵にデンジヤラスでバカでアホで最つつつつ高だろ？


急に楽しくなった俺は、呆気にとられて他のチンピラの関節をレンチでぶっ壊して、ラッドの兄貴と仲良くなったのさあ。

俺はただ小器用なだけの馬鹿だけだよ……ラッドの兄貴は不器用な天才さ！ 生きていく上で不器用としか言えない部分に、自分の全ての才能を注ぎ込んでしまつてる！

だからこそ、ラッドの兄貴は最高ののさ。

最初から粉々にぶっ壊れてるのに、あんなにも輝いてるんだからな！ そつだろ？





……悲しい話だ。

こんな悲しい話が存在しているのか？

俺がラッドの兄貴と会ったのは、星の無い夜の事だった。……だめだ。星の無い夜。星が無い。この時点で既に悲しい、悲しすぎる。考えてもみる！ 星が……星が無いんだぞ！ こんなに悲しい事があるか……？ 駄目だ。もう悲しすぎて話にならない。俺とラッドの兄貴の出会いには、そんな悲しさから綴られる。駄目だ。全てが気だるい。殺せ、いつそ俺を殺せ、この星の無い夜にラッドの兄貴みたいに超絶的に超越的に超人的に……あああああつあつあつ……ん？ んー……んー、あー……

……YES！

その通り、その通りだよ！ ラッドの兄貴は超絶的で超越的で超人的だ。思

い出した思い出した。これほど楽しい話もねえ！

ラッドの兄貴はさ、ただの解体技師だった俺と星つ無いスリリングでデンジャラスな夜に出会った！ ラッドの兄貴は、俺がボクサー崩れのチンピラどもからリッチに遭った時にフラって現れて、さっきの俺と同じように「星が無くて絶望したねえ。いつそ殺せ」って言ったんだよ。

チンピラどもが顔を見合わせた瞬間、ラッドの兄貴の拳がチンピラの歯を丁寧に力強く確実に解体した。それで、兄貴はなんて言ったと思う？

「……人を殺すときは、相手に殺されても仕方がないって良く言うよな」

って言った後によ……

「つまり俺が『殺せ』って言ったって事は、それを言われたお前は俺を殺す権利が生じると同時に、俺に殺される権利も



## About Ladd Russo

### Graham Spector's Rant

...such a tragedy.

Has such a sorrowful story occurred in the entire world?

When I met Boss Ladd, it was a night without stars. ...no. A ""starless"" night. Starless. That's already a mournful setting...extremely mournful! Think about it! Stars – stars unseen! Is there anything more mournful than that? No, if it's too mournful, it wouldn't be a good story. Ladd and I met in precisely such a sorrowful atmosphere. No, everything about it drags down your spirits. Kill...Frankly, just go ahead and kill me. On such a starless night, for such a supreme, superior, superhuman human as Ladd to... ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh... hmm...hmm...ah...YES!

That's right! That's right! Boss Ladd is a superhuman! I remember, I remember...so many joyful things too!

On such a starless night, I, a lowly mechanic, met Ladd! Ladd met me along with this bunch of underground freeloaders, and he said, "It's so hopeless without the stars, you might as well die."

So the gang blinked at one another, and in that instant, Ladd had already punched one of them and knocked out his teeth. And what do you think Ladd said then?

"As they say, 'When preparing to kill someone, be wary of being killed yourself.' There's no way around it.

"This word, 'kill.' When you hear this word, you have the right to try to kill me, but I also have the right to kill you. That's the nature of existence, isn't it?"

Such was Ladd's philosophy! Insanely happy, beautifully riotous, stupidly idiotic – isn't that very, very cool?

So whenever the gang sees me suddenly happy, they think I'm disgraceful. But then I met Ladd, and he kicked their collective asses, so who's the disgrace one? He put them in their place. Then he and I became good friends.

I'm just an idiot with a bit of cleverness...However, Ladd is a lunatic genius. If we're alive, then we must strive to overcome our shortcomings.

Therefore, Boss Ladd is the greatest.

Even though at first he started off by beating the crap out of everyone, doesn't that make him stellar? Right?



# ヒューイ・ラフオレットについて

エルマー・C・アルハトロス愉快な語り

んー。そうだね。ヒューイと初めて会ったのは、まだ15ぐらいの時だったかなあ。

あいつは世の中全部憎んでるって感じで、何をするにも一歩引いた目で周りを見てた。

俺にも最初はきつくあたってきたけど、話してる内に段々笑ってくれるようになった。

だから、ヒューイはいい奴さ。みんなヒューイの事を避けてたし、ヒューイの奴もまともに話すのは俺と錬金術の先生ぐらいだったけど……でも、俺には解る。あいつはいい奴だよ。今でも俺の一番の友達だ。

あいつは、普段は作り笑いばかりしてる奴だけど……たまに、本当に笑うんだ。

そんな時だけ、ヒューイは本音を漏らす。

「俺は、この世界を全部滅ぼしたい。お前も俺も先生も含めて、何も残さず」

それが、最初に聞いたヒューイの本音だったよ。俺と会う前に色々辛い事があつたみたいだし、それもしょうがないと思う。俺から言う事でもないから詳しく言えないけど。

で、俺は「それは困る」って言ったんだ。

もしお前のその夢が叶ったら、お前が「夢が叶った」って言って心底喜んでる顔が、

お前のハッピーエンドが見られないって。

俺は、あいつのハッピーエンドを一番見てみたいんだ。……ま、ハッピーだろうってバッドだろうが「終わりを見たい」なんて身勝手に失礼な話だと思っけとね。

だけど——マイザー達と初めて会って、ちよつとした冒険をした後ぐらいかな……。

「俺は、やっぱりこの世界を滅ぼしたい」

って言ったんだけど……その時は、作り笑いだった！ 本当に良かったよ。

でも、人を人と思わないで実験する癖はまだ直ってないかもねえ。あれは、あいつなりの生き方なんだと思う。

不器用な奴なんだ。

だけど、幸せになつて欲しい。いや、だからこそ幸せになつて欲しい。

不器用なら不器用なりに、絶対にみんなと幸せになる方法はある筈だからさ。

## About Huey Laforet

### The Joyful Reminiscence of Elmer C. Albatross

Hmm, when I met Huey, I was fifteen.

I felt then that he was detached, held himself above everything – and that no matter what he was about to do, he'd always step back to assess the situation first.

And even though he was pretty cold to me in the beginning, after a while he would start to smile at me.

So Huey's a good person. But everyone always avoids him, except for me and the alchemy teacher. But I know that he's a good person. Even now, he's still a good friend.

Usually he just puts on a smiling face...only rarely would he show a true smile.

And only afterwards would he speak from his heart.

"I plan to destroy the whole world. Including you and Master – everyone."

That was the first time I heard Huey tell the truth. Because before he met me, he'd suffered through a lot, so I guess he couldn't be any other way. But because I didn't say anything, he didn't elaborate.

But all I said was, "That would be awful."

If your dreams come true, I would never see your smile again, and I would never see the Happy End.

For me, what I want to see the most is your Happy End...well, whether joyful or sorrowful, I want to see you to the end.

But when meeting Maiza for the first time, it was after we took on something a bit risky...

"I still want to destroy this world."


He always says that...and his smile would be a fake smile. It was wonderful.

But he never regards people as people, and still hasn't dropped his habit of doing experiments on them. I guess that's his way of life, that idiot.

But I still wish him happiness. It's precisely because of this that I wish him happiness.

Even though, yeah, he can be an idiot, I still wish him happiness just like everyone else.





## ヴィクター・タルボットについて――

21世紀ノ世ニテ、ナイル奇々ト語ル  
イライラ

あえて言おう。

奴に対して言う事など何もない。恨み言以外はな。

昔から規律には厳しい奴だった。厳しすぎる奴で、自分の感情よりも規則だの契約だのを優先して口にする奴だった。

だが、あえて言おう。

奴は別に規則通りにしか動けない堅物というわけでも、人を規則で縛り付けるのが大好きな独裁者というわけでも無かった。

ただ、みんなができるだけ平等に幸せになる為に必要なのが法であると判断しただけなのだろう。

ヴィクターは頭のいい馬鹿だったからな。

世の中全員が幸せに暮らせる方法など無いと理解していた。互いの考えや価値観、感情の違いを調整するのは、法である程度の不自由を与える事が一番の解決策だと判断した。

そこまではいい。それは普通の考えだ。だが、あいつはそうした規則からくる不

満を一手に引き受ける為に、自分から憎まれ役を買って出た。その上で、あいつはどうしようもないひねくれ者だからな。他者の目には横暴な独裁者と映っても仕方ないだろう。

あえて言おう。奴は最高に不器用な男ではあるが――錬金術師連中の中では、特に人間臭い男だった。斬九郎と並んでな。

他の連中は、エルマーにしろヒューイにしろラブロにしろマイザーにしろセラードにしろ……その他の連中にしろ、どこか人間的に壊れていたからな。ヴィクターも馬鹿ではあるが、ある意味では一番他人思いかもしれない。

とんだ偽悪者だ。

今は、かつて錬金術師のグループを規制で縛ろうとしたように、アメリカという国に対して同じ事をしている。

余程好きなのであるうな。あの国と、あの国に住まう国民の事が、まったくもって――不器用な奴だ。



## About Victor Talbot

### Recollections from Nile, in the 21st Century

All right then, let's see.

I haven't much to say about him. Other than objections to his person.

He has always had a severe personality - overly severe; someone who consistently values rules and regulations above his own emotions.

So, yes, I do have a bit to say about him.

He's not someone who follows the rules just for rules' sake, nor is he an authoritarian who would use rules to bind others. But for everyone to be equally happy, we must all benefit from the protection of the law.

Victor is an imbecile, but clever in his own way. He recognizes that there is no single way to make everyone in the world satisfied. Hence, to accommodate different perspectives, values, and feelings, law is necessary.

The solution is a certain measure of subjugation.

That is correct – that's his usual attitude.

But he would still find such regulations unsatisfactory. So, he's even willing to become a black sheep for the sake of his beliefs and take up an unpopular occupation. In addition, he's utterly stiff and uncompromising. So all think him despotic.

Please understand this: this is all off the top of my head.

He is a foolish man. Of all the alchemists, he most resembles an ordinary human being, comparable to Kanshichiro. All the alchemists, whether it's Fermet, Huey, or Maiza, none can escape their flawed humanity. And although Victor's just as flawed and pathetic, from a certain point of view, one might say that out of everyone, he is the most considerate and can put himself in another's shoes.

He tried to regulate the alchemists back then, and now, to exercise control over them once more, he has been attempting to tighten his grip on them in this America. I suppose he has grown fond of this country, and so he's also fond of its citizens and thinks of their well-being.

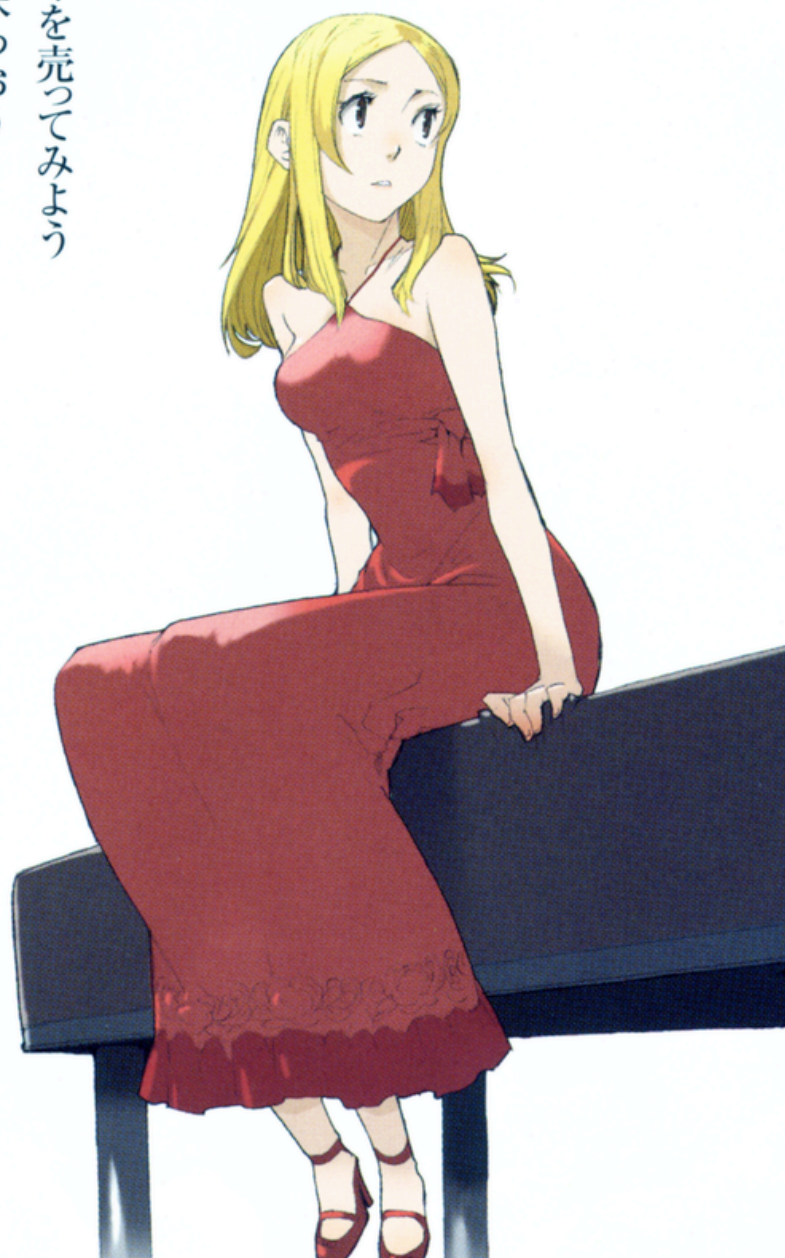
I say this: what an obdurate blockhead!



263	237	207	195	167	135	107	89	75	63	41	17	11
第四章表	第三章裏	第三章表	間章Ⅰ	第二章裏	第二章表	第一章裏	第二章表	プロローグⅣ	プロローグⅢ	プロローグⅡ	プロローグⅠ	エピソードⅠ

情報屋にて  
カモツリスタ  
暴人  
暗殺者  
いつもの  
刑務所に行こう  
とりあえず喧嘩を売ってみよう  
サイコの晩餐を味わおう  
とりあえず話をしてみよう  
闇の中で  
監獄ライフを満喫しよう  
間違いは素直に認めましょう  
外に思いを馳せてみよう

369	363	311	295
余章	接続章	第五章表裏二体	第四章裏
刑務所を出たよ!	情報屋にて	刑務所を出よう!	相談しよう、そうしよう





バツカーハ!  
1934 獄中編  
Alice In Jails

## Epilogue I : At the Press

Where does this story begin?

This story I'm telling – where it begins, where it ends – it's all pretty muddled. Strictly speaking, things probably started before I was born, and haven't reached a conclusion yet.

Well, shouldn't what I feel be part of the story I'm telling?

Should stories only be realistic descriptions? Haha, how dumb would that be.

Me, I'm just an intelligence officer. But I'm not telling you all of this because I want money.

To complete – right, to complete the intelligence report.

I can't only rely on the information I already have. Absolutely not.

Only by stitching together many disparate stories can you arrive at a complete tale.

That's right, that's what intelligence is – a complete story made from many different perspectives. And that's the work of an intelligence officer, to objectively organize all of these narratives into a whole.

Though, to be precise...I like chasing the stories I find interesting, so as an intelligence officer, I'm pretty subjective.

What do you mean, "Don't get excited" ?

Oh, you would never understand, never understand.

Isn't this excitement for new intelligence?

Sniff the air around you. Even though it seems like empty air, there's still a lot of useful information.

Actually, that's a perfect example. Isn't this feeling of anticipation an important element of the atmosphere in the story I'm about to tell?

So in the end, I often insert my own feelings. Striving for objectivity is the goal of your journalists. For us, when we see events unfold right in front of us, we can't consider those events in the same way.

Well, that's what it's like. The "past" is really only our own construction, our feelings towards it.

Isn't this what you live on?

Greedily extracting the blood and sweat of the people, their knowledge and courage, their scandals and dreams, abilities and feelings, pasts, hopes, and after editing and distorting it, presenting it before the public?

...hey, don't look all offended. I'm actually complimenting you, you know?

This isn't working. Without your input, we can't complete the task at hand.



That wasn't an insult. Our vice-president is Gustav St. Germain. Him and the president - even when we try to insult them with what I just said, he'd only smile and say, "Why, thank you for the compliments." So there. What can you do.

Gustav St. Germain is really generous when it comes to spending money. Of course, the president's like that too, though I don't think he's ever raised his head out of all those stacks of documents.

...hey, don't look so perplexed. I'm just making fun.

I knew from a long time ago.

Vice-President Gustav is in Chicago right now, right? Along with that girl photographer who looks like a rotund watermelon. Yesterday, they were living in the Gansilaku Hotel in Chicago, and ate ham and eggs for breakfast this morning.

...and how do I know all this?

That's because I occasionally stay in the same hotel.

You see the photographer with her mouth full of ham and eggs, sitting by the gifts from the liquor store? Well, the waiter standing by and refilling their coffee is me.

And after rolling her eyes at the coffee, the girl courageously downed it all in one gulp.

Oh, you're going to tell me the timeline doesn't add up again, right? As in it's impossible to go from Chicago to here in only a few short hours.

Whoops.

You guys really don't know anything. The stuff about me.

Oh, me?

Well, this is me. Hmm...how to explain.

Even if we're just talking about my name, I have a few hundred.

Oh no no. I don't mean fake names. I really have many real names.

And as for bodies, I take as many forms as I have names.

But I only have one consciousness, one self.

Ai...what do I mean...well, if you can number consciousness, I only have one.

It's really hard to describe consciousness. We all clearly know our consciousness exist, but we can't really attach a number to it. After people die and before they're born, can we say in total they have zero consciousnesses? What about when you're sleeping? Or just daydreaming?

Originally, my "consciousness" was just the same as your "consciousness," even though no one could prove that.

Yeah, that's right. That's exactly right.



Oh, my name. Sorry, sorry.

Sorry for my bad manners.

My consciousness is pretty hard to fix.

But I don't know whether I should be speaking to you with great respect? From someone like me, who has numerous names and forms.

But I also have one popular name, which each physical form could use.

Maybe we'll run into each other a lot from now on, so I'll tell you.

Sham.

Don't bother trying to remember it, because it's just a name suitable for social interaction.

Well, that's all I have to say. I look forward to meeting you again sometime.

All right...let's start again.

Where should I begin?

Regarding this incident, where I went, where I didn't go.

Also, there's one more thing I need to say up front.

This incident has already ended.

If you think about this incident as one sector of a large plate, then maybe it would never ever end. But overall, it looks like the end is in sight.

The "same" event occurred simultaneously in New York and Chicago, and on the San Francisco coast.

I repeat:

I don't know when it appeared, nor do I know when it will disappear.

As per the conditions of our agreement, I need to know what goes on when I'm not around.

...never mind. We'll leave this to later. Where should I start from?

You can say that this story has many beginnings. Since its true origins are mysterious, then let's just choose a simple starting point for now.

First, I'm going to tell you about a certain Camorrista member in an interrogation room.

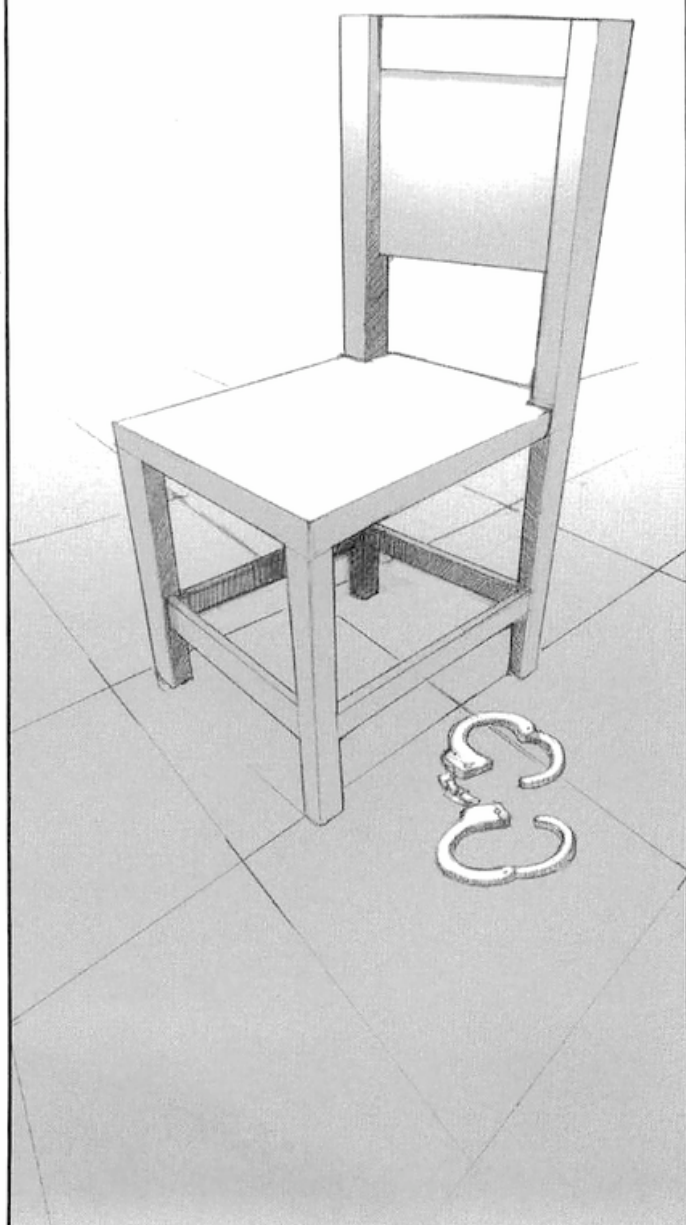
He's a young member in the Camorra, which is actually quite different from the Mafia.

Poor boy. Trapped inside the FBI, his name is --



カモツリスタ

フロローグー





## Prologue 1 : Camorrista

(1934, a basement somewhere in Manhattan)

“Firo Prochainezo.”

“.....”

That’s his name.

It’s not an alias – that’s his real name, the one his parents gave him.

Across from the restrained boy sat a man with a smug expression. “You sure look relaxed,” he whispered. “Like a lead on Broadway. Except those shows are comedies.”

“...if you envy me, Mr. Inspector Special Agent Edward, we can switch places.”

His expression mocking, Firo Prochainezo said this with his honorific speech dripping with sarcasm, and so rebutted this insult. It was hard to tell whether his face was that of a teenager or a young adult.

On his wrists was a pair of shiny handcuffs, keeping him pretty much immobile.

The room was tiny, and for Firo, who was restricted, the room seemed tinier. And he couldn’t judge what this room was used for, nor what its inner dimensions were. He was stuffed into a police vehicle and brought here, brought into a seemingly ordinary building, and into this room, and so Firo had no idea about his surroundings.

Firo saw that there was only a mirror on the wall, but no windows. A way away there was a sturdy door.

On the cold, bare brick wall, there was a flickering electric lamp, giving the room a smothered feeling. The dust swirled thickly under the dim light. Firo imagined all the dust filtering into his lungs, and decided to breathe shallow.

“...I thought I was an honored guest, but then landed in a place like this. Well, you seemed to have crawled up to a nice job. It fits perfectly with a scruffy person like you. Or, who knows, maybe you were just demoted due to incompetence?”

Upon hearing such naked insult, young FBI Agent Inspector Edward Noah just shrugged and looked at the “criminal” before him. “This interrogation room was specially designed. You feel pretty awful, I know, but you’re going to have to endure it,” he said.

“...that’s strange, Inspector Edward.”

“What?”

“Well, if this was before, when I’d jest with you like I was just now, you’d already be red in the face with fury.”

Edward looked at the baby-faced young man before him, who was saying things so at odds with his appearance. “You’ve changed yourself.”

“...”

“If you want to talk about how we were before, before you wouldn’t have come with the authorities so quietly.”

Firo merely rolled his eyes at the inspector’s long memory. “...I just don’t want to be trouble for my organization.”

“So that’s it. That actually sounds like you. Perhaps that’s your distinguishing quality among those petty rats you call an ‘organization.’”

“I owe you the ‘petty’ part. But for you G-men, all organizations must look pretty petty.”

Even though this was an insult, Edward seemed to take it as a compliment. Mollified, he offered an explanation. “Just ‘investigation’ doesn’t describe us anymore – we wouldn’t have arrest authority. So starting next year, we’re changing our name...The Federal Bureau of Investigation. A name simple yet awe-inspiring. Yes, our organization shall be renamed the ‘FBI.’”

“...that’s such a pompous name. When it comes down to it, you’re still the Bureau of Investigation.”

The Bureau of Investigation. Before, it was just a small part of the Department of Justice, but now it had already grown into the best-known police force in America.

1924. Since the time of Director J. Edgar Hoover, this bureau expanded – in such a short time, it had become a powerful and influential department. During the Prohibition, it garnered fame for dealing out justice to the black markets run by notorious gangs.

“It looks like a baaaaad year for you,” Edward said, and sidled up to the handcuffed young man. “Ever since the National Firearms Act came into effect, you guys couldn’t have your gunfights anymore. Don’t you feel frustrated now that your lifestyle’s been outlawed?”

“...I never really use those weapons, so it doesn’t affect me.”

This was the year of the National Firearms Act, which was really a national measure specifically implemented to limit the activity of the criminal organizations. Never mind the Thompson submachine gun, all the weapons with less firepower like various shotguns and other firearms equipment had been banned. This was the anti-gun law.

“Even silencers are banned? If so, don’t you think ordinary citizens working on weapons as a living would lose their livelihood?”

“Do you really think that ordinary citizens manufacture firearms? Or tolerate others who manufacture something to help you lot assassinate people?” Edward objected. Then he continued casually, as if he didn’t need to be formal with the likes of Firo, even as an officer of the law. “Also, it’s the first year that the Prohibition was lifted. It must be a hard year those of you running speakeasies.”

“Not a lucky year, no. But whether we’re selling black market liquor or not, our stores are always pretty popular.”

“Plus there’s those gambling dens you run.”



“Come on, you’re just going to keep asking me these one by one? What a waste of time.” Firo was getting impatient.

Another voice spoke up. "Well, it looks like you're getting along great."

The door opened, and in crowded three men, making the room seem even smaller.

“Oh...hello. This is the first time we’ve met, right? I’m Bill Sullivan.” The foremost man looked sleepy-eyed, and introduced himself with a leisurely air. He gestured to the two men behind him. “Right, this tall fellow here’s called Donald Brown. The one with the glasses is Alan Baker. We’re Edward’s colleagues,” Inspector Bill continued. And behind him, the other two wore poker faces and batted not an eyelash.

“Hey, sorry man. Our colleague isn’t very friendly. But that’s because he works so hard...”

Bill moved like he spoke, slowly. He sidled towards Edward, picked up the files on the table, and as if to confirm Firo’s background, started reading. “Ah...Firo Prochainezo...22 years old. Single. From Hell’s Kitchen in New York. Father’s Italian, Mother’s American. Both parents died from tuberculosis...terribly sorry. Upon mother’s death, went to Hell’s Kitchen, drifted among New York’s roads and alleys. Thereafter, we’re not sure what you were up to, but you’re just like your father – ended up in the Mafia.”

“It’s not the Mafia.”

Upon hearing his parents mentioned, Firo dropped his carefully blank expression, and craned his neck to give Bill an icy glare, correcting him.

“It’s the Camorra.”

Firo Prochainezo wasn’t an ordinary person.

Socially speaking, he was a capo of an underground society, who represented the zeitgeist of the time.

Even though this description was adequate, to be more specific Firo wasn’t a part of America’s largest criminal organization, La Cosa Nostra, but the Camorra organization originating from Italy. It was different from the organizations originating in Sicily; the Camorra came from Naples. Although its structure and means of profit were different from the Mafia, in America all these other organizations tended to get lumped in together with the Mafia.

Firo Prochainezo belonged to the Martillo Family, which within the Camorra was a fairly small cadre and had a limited influence. Even so, there were over ten people in total, and more than a quarter were active agents.

Firo was the youngest member, and managed a small underground casino. The day he became a made man, Firo knew that one day he would have to prepare to sacrifice his life, and knew he had to take his life of his enemy. So when Edward decided to interrogate him in person, Firo wasn’t worried at all. He was quite confident that he would be able to hide what they wanted to know.

Even though he had such a child-like face, behind this was a gangster leader well-acquainted with what it took to live on the streets. And this gangster now stared coldly at Bill.

This was a part of Firo that not many knew about.

“Ah...Camorra. Sorry, I deliberately got it wrong.”

Looking at the smiley Bill, Firo also grinned. But his stare was still icy, and in his heart marked Bill as an enemy.

“...in the future, when you go out at night, be careful. You can’t keep landing in our jurisdiction.”

“Then I must thank you for your advice.”

Bill smiled contentedly, and continued as if Firo hadn’t said anything. “Well, the main reason you were trailed – I only heard this, you understand – is that you’re connected with last year’s Mist Wall incident and destroyed valuable public property. But since officially we hasn’t started investigating, you don’t need to be so gung-ho, Edward.”

Bill acted as if this was a friendly chat that didn’t pertain to the bureau at all, and Firo frowned and glanced at Brown and Baker, and then fixated back on Bill.

Man, what a nuisance.

He couldn’t possibly have said what he just said to Edward if he hadn’t heard their conversation. Bill was probably eavesdropping behind that door the whole time.

“Bill, be serious.” It was the guy called Donald Brown, and his tone was strict.

Edward seemed to be used to all this, and stood to the side, expressionless. But the other guy with glasses laughed and patted Firo in the head.

“Just give up. He really likes snubbing you little pipsqueaks.”

Firo shook free of the hand patting his head, and glared at the man who thought him a child. “Stop that immediately. I’m not a kid.”

Age-wise, he wasn’t a child, but he hadn’t yet started to look adult. Firo gave the impression of being a very lively young man, someone in his prime.

The man adjusted his glasses, and sandwiched himself in front of Edward and the table to sit in the empty seat across from Firo.

Upon seeing this weird guy, Firo started. ...Was he called Alan or something? He looked pretty arrogant - what manner of spirit or deity was he? Was he so relaxed because he knew Firo was a prime suspect?

Musing over this, Firo felt he couldn’t pin the guy down. But suddenly he felt that there was something off about him.

That’s not possible.

Firo felt he knew this guy from somewhere, but also knew that they’d never met before. That’s right – in his twenty something years of life, he’d never met this guy. Yet his impression floated in Firo’s memory.



...wait. It can't be...

Just as Firo realized the implications of all this, the guy with the glasses smiled and said, "You're in quite a dangerous position, Firo Prochainezo."

The glasses guy kept on smiling at Firo while repeatedly opening and closing his right hand. "If I were hungry, you'd probably have been lunch by now."

This sparked a reminder to Firo, and he finally remembered who his opponent really was.

His memories were correct. He'd never met this guy. But an impression of him did exist in Firo's memory.

Or rather, in the memory of the alchemist who wanted to "eat" him, Szilard.

Firo Prochainezo wasn't an ordinary human.

Strictly speaking, he probably wasn't even a human.

Four years ago, a strange incident occurred where Firo found himself in a fight among alchemists, and he and his comrades all became immortal.

No matter how severely he was wounded, he would immediately recover. And his progression towards old age stopped too.

Whether he liked it or not, Firo became a new kind of life form that could live forever. Whether he was plummeted into the depths of the ocean, or dissolved into molten lead and sealed up – he was forced to live on.

This was the third aspect of Firo Prochainezo that few knew about.

"All that stuff the demon said about the 'Law of Immortals,' well, what a muddled pile of..." said the man who called himself Alan Baker, shaking his head at the frozen Firo. "Can't recall? Well, I suppose people could have distorted their memory of me to suit their own convenience."

Firo followed the line of borrowed memories, and finally remembered this man's name.

"Victor...Are you Victor Talbot?"

He was one of the alchemists along with Szilard, and summoned a demon, and drank the immortal elixir. Back then, Szilard and those Szilard had eaten were quarrelling, but other than this, Firo didn't seem to remember much else.

Looking at the man before him, Firo knew he must be right. After all, it was probably hard to find someone as cocky as he was.

As Firo reached this conclusion, he suddenly recalled how Victor had patted him on the top of the head with his right hand...and paled.

"Ah."

Hearing such a simple proclamation of his understanding, Victor grinned.

“ ”

“ ”

[illegible]



ha... annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying annoying.

But whether it's criminals who act all honourable, or ones who feel righteous, or ones who are only self-righteous, I struggle day to day to treat them as equals. And why do I struggle? Because I find you all so annoying ...ha...haaaa...ka ka.."

Firo couldn't help a surprised expression taking over his face as Victor coughed across the table.

"You know, if you can't say it all in one breath then don't say all of it...and you had to do it twice? You must be really dumb."

"Fine, I'm dumb. But that's better than you, captured by someone who was dumb, and now can't do a damn thing about it."

Firo didn't even register this poor excuse of an insult. "Since you already knew I was an immortal...why didn't you think that I could suddenly put my right hand on your head and eat you?"

Before, Victor and Firo were pretty far apart, but now, this really did pose some threat for the former. Between them was a table about a meter across, and Firo could easily kick this over or slip under it, and even though he was wearing handcuffs, he could still smack his right hand over Victor's head.

Firo figured that how Victor answered this question would help him figure out his enemy's personality.

But Victor remained as he was. His attitude remained the same, and no hint of alarm passed in front of his eyes. Moreover, his insulting tone remained.

"You're hilarious. Are you going to try and test my immortality?"

"What do you mean?"

"What you just said. Don't you think it's exactly like empty threats from other small-time criminals we bring in here? Like 'I'm going to leap over there and poke your eyes out!' Do you really think agents of the government would be so easily intimidated?"

--- Sigh. He's just a cocky asshole.

That Firo reached this conclusion regarding Victor's character didn't mean that he couldn't respond to Victor's challenge. Rather, it was because in the long rant before, Victor had already totally impressed himself on every molecule in the room.

Between them, there was still unspeakable gravity. Firo wasn't sure how Victor gave the signal, but Edward and Donald sidled to two sides of the table, and Bill moved behind Firo and started to smoke a cigarette. And Victor just adjusted himself slightly in his chair, his right hand on his waist.

If Firo did something sudden, perhaps all four of them would shoot at once.

"...You've got to be kidding. Don't you realize you'd shoot each other?"

Victor was going to give a rebuttal, but then decided to elaborate. “Originally we were each going to give you a beating. But then, we wouldn’t know what to do about your screaming. So, we decided to cut off your hands and feet, and to prevent them from returning to your body, we’d put them into separate safes, until you beg us to return them.”

“...ah, I see.”

“Losing your means of fighting would be amusing. You could also say that’s one of the few amusement we have as immortals, right?”

Facing a self-satisfied Victor, Firo decided that it was pointless to continue this verbal joust.

So, he decided to act.

Without warning, Firo placed his cuffed hands at the edges of the table and heaved upwards, sending the table straight up into the air.

It was a shabby table, and quite heavy.

And then Firo immediately prepared to attack his enemy, but froze.

There was no sign of Victor.

--- Where was he!?

As he was searching for Victor, the table ceased its upward spin and came crashing down onto the floor.

There was a sound of gun cocking.

At the same time, the muzzle appeared before Firo’s face.

“Sit down.”

Firo lifted his head slowly, to see Victor standing on the table, pointing a gun at him.

Victor grinned at Firo and said, “So, as expected, as expected...just as the reports say. Explosive temper, surprising strength and speed.”

“...do all you agents have these acrobatic abilities?”

“Mm hmm. It’s a very useful skill set for pursuing and catching you rapacious criminals. Every properly trained agent is capable of this...Even more accomplished than I am. Faster! Even more captivating moves!”

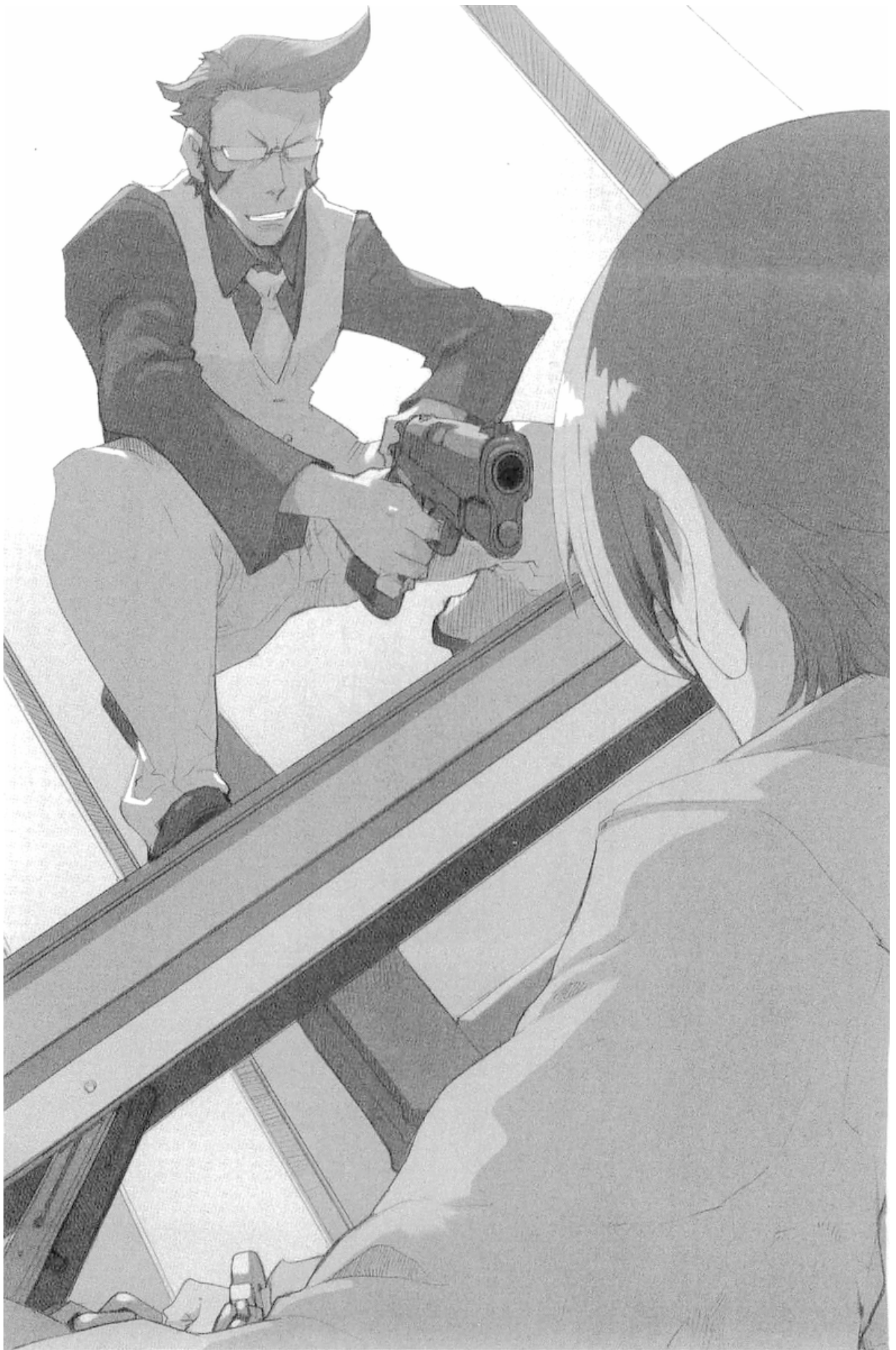
Hearing such high-flying comments from Victor, the other agents in the room started cutting in.

“Oh no no...how could we ever do that...?”

“You can’t raise the bar for new agents just like that.”

“Inspector Talbot, you’re making the table dirty...please come down.”





“...Okay, okay. Damn it, what a bunch of useless colleagues.” Victor sounded extremely unhappy, but holstered his gun and jumped down from the table, and returned to his seat.

“Ah, well. I have jumps calculated well, but to land on the table is rare.”

“...oh.”

“...”

“...”

There was a glowering silence between Firo and Victor.

After a few moments, Firo continued. “All right, let’s keep going. If it’s just the Mist Wall incident and the destruction of public property, you guys have been acting overly harsh. What exactly do you want me to do?”

The incident last year, when the skyscraper Mist Wall had been bombed, Firo had been dragged into it and was a witness. It involved many organizations, plus the doings of many of the immortals. They converged upon the building, owned by the Nebula organization, and caused mass destruction.

Ennis and Firo were lead by a man called Christopher, and were brought from the perimeter right into the heart of the operation.

Of course, Firo knew the actual perpetrator of the bombing. But for some reason, the police didn’t move for a long time.

According to Maiza, who outranked Firo in the Camorra, it was “probably just to put pressure on anyone involved in the bombing” or something like that.

It had been a year already, and Firo didn’t expect to be dragged into this sort of place.

-- Damn, I had time to do something about all this.

As if mocking Firo’s ineptitude, Victor kept smiling and changed the subject.

“Oh. Well, we were going to take you on a sort of...trip.”

“A trip?”

“Oh, to the west coast. To a San Francisco in bloom. A vacation amidst sea and sky...do you want to go? If you’re lucky, you might even see the stars of your kind. A long rest in a still, silent place like that isn’t so bad.”

Firo had a bad feeling about this.

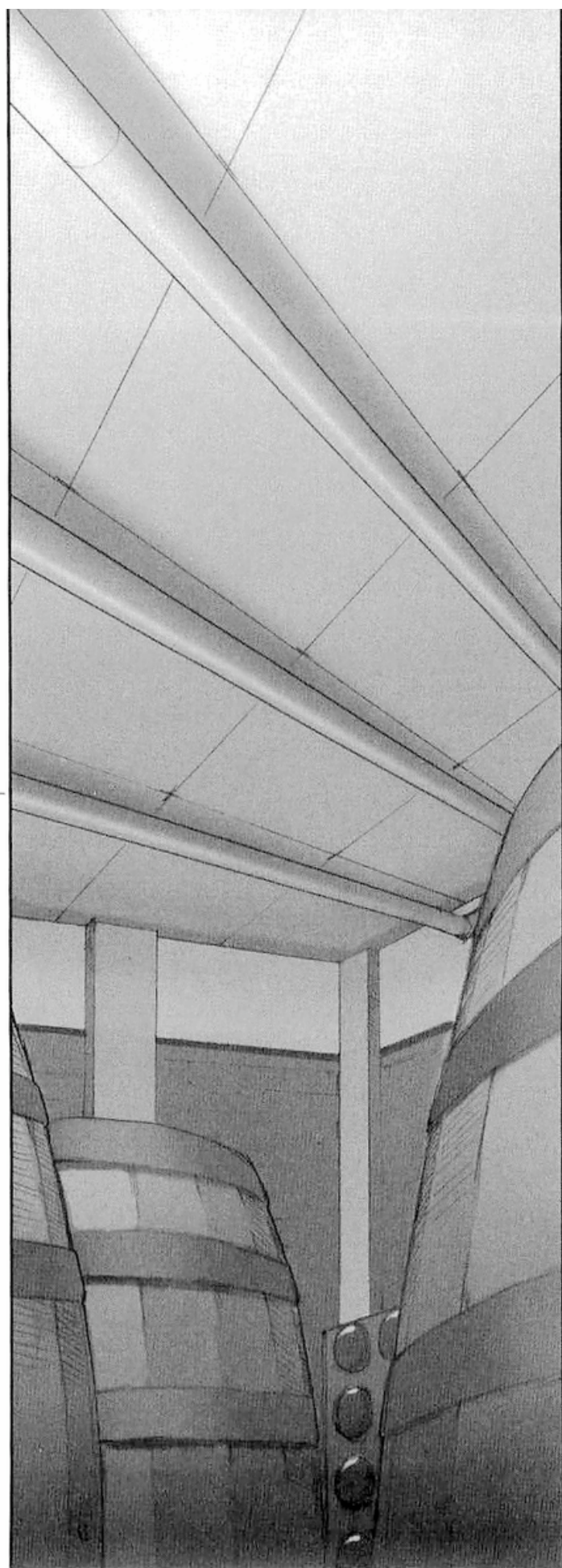
For underground agents like Firo, the stuff inspectors and police say about “the west coast” and “San Francisco” and “blue sky and jade waters” had all been mysterious lines with indiscernible meanings. But the last thing Victor said made everything horribly clear.

In Firo’s mind, a name appeared.

His worst expectations confirmed, Victor grinned and delivered it right into Firo’s ears.

“Alcatraz Island. Haven’t you heard of it?”





ブロックⅡ

暴人

## Prologue 2 : Man of Violence

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A certain tavern's underground drinking room

You wanna know about a prisoner who moved from the joint I worked at to Alcatraz?

Aha, I see. Yeah, I guess you wouldn't want to talk about something like this in public.

...But y'know, I was just a normal Joe Schmoe guard even before I quit. I can't remember schmucks we all called by numbers. Well, I guess if it was someone who was bad enough to take a trip to the Rock, I might be able to remember...

What? 302010?

...!

...

Ha... haha...

Oh... ohh, ohh.

Ooooooh!

That bastard, you mean! Yeah, of course I remember him. His number was easy to memorize and, well, I guess you could say I couldn't forget him if I tried.

Yeah, I know his name. It bothered me, see.

Ladd... Ladd Russo, I think.

They say he's Placido Russo's nephew. Yeah, the don of the Russo Family in Chicago.

I think he was in prison for murder, or robbery... I dunno, a buncha stuff like that, but that don't matter. To us guards, prisoners are just a series of numbers. Don't matter if you were a mass murderer or a petty thief or some sorta shadow don outside. Inside, you're just a number... Well, that's how it's supposed to be, anyway.

How was it really? I dunno, that's different from prison to prison, and it's something I'm none too eager to stick my nose into.

But you don't really care about that, do ya?

I thought you wanted to know about 302010... Ladd, right?

Aah, you're thinkin' to yourself that I'm too bright an' perky for my own good, aren't ya?

Back when I was still a guard, I tried to be the kinda guy who's silent and efficient. The menacing kind, you know? But, but, I'm so different from the me of back then especially because we're talking about him right now, got it? Yeah?

When, when he first came to jail, I gave him a rough checkup. It's all to drive it home to them that they're criminals, that they have to give up their pride, that they're losers now. To teach 'em that from now on it's time for them beg us for forgiveness, for the crimes they committed against society.

Uh, no, the other guards don't go that far. Though it is important to make sure the prisoners' wills are broken.

I kinda strutted around a little more than the others. Just a little.

You understand, don'tcha? I just thought it was pretty neat that no matter how bad you were outside, in here I was the boss. A guy could be forgiven for showing off a little. It's not like the prisoners can say anything about it.

Anyway, so, yeah.

I told you before, but I'll say it again. The reason I'm bein' so casual right now is to try and get as far away from the me of back then as I can.

You don't understand?

...No, well, yeah. I'll tell you later. Later.

Yeah, it's about Ladd.

He was unusual in a lot of ways.

He looked really lively when he first stepped into prison.

I thought for sure that he was some sorta big cheese who'd slipped some money to a lawyer and thought he'd be in an' out in a flash, or maybe he'd got into some trouble with another mafia family and he'd come here to hide from them.

Yeah, I guess you could hide in jail for a while. Though if you'd made an enemy of a powerful man, I guess he'd just send a killer to slit your throat in prison or something. We can't recognize that sort of thing, though they might.

But I asked the other guards and it turns out he ain't like that. He was a really suspicious guy, in a lot of ways. They said he started something on some train... but in the end, they made it like that train incident never happened.

Nah, I dunno that much. I don't know a thing about that stuff. It looks like the country itself is covering things up, but... the details didn't make their way to my ears, and he didn't seem inclined to talk about it, either.

Yeah, he was a quiet one.

I mean, he looked lively enough, but he didn't talk much. We let him make calls outside from time to time, and even then he didn't really say much that could be a problem.

He did what we told him to do. I guess you could've called him a model prisoner.



He had bandages wrapped all over one arm, like he'd gotten hurt bad... Well, it was actually a prosthetic. We checked it carefully, to make sure he didn't have some sorta escape tool in it or something, but there wasn't much to it. The joints didn't move. It was a pretty simple thing. The only thing about it that was peculiar was that it was connected directly to his upper arm, or his bones or something... Nah, that's the first I've heard of something like that, too, but from what I hear they used the exposed bone itself. One of the guys who gave him a physical check said it gave him the shivers.

I thought maybe it'd get infected and he'd die, but somehow he managed to stay healthy.

He didn't make any trouble, just spent the days as a prisoner. Actually, he even volunteered for prison labor, a real model inmate. I know because we kept close watch over him, just to make sure he didn't use a screw from his fake arm to pick a lock or something.

But he really didn't do anything to stand out, and time passed.

...Until then.

It was just a few months ago when he changed... no, I guess the better term for it'd be that he showed his true colors.

It was right around when Alcatraz was changed from a military prison to a normal one.

I think you know about it, so well, yeah.

That jail ain't normal.

Nobody ever goes to the Rock straight from the street.

That place's a jail for people already in jail.

A paradise on the west coast, specially for every prison's worst inmates.

Anyway, the worst of the worst at the joint I was working at then was... yeah, this guy called Gustavo was the most dangerous, no question.

You know the Runorata Family, right? They're one of the bigger organizations around these parts.

Gustavo was one of the higher-ups there... but he musta caused some trouble and got himself arrested.

He had this huge scar around his neck, big enough that you'd think it shoulda killed him, but just like Ladd it looked like a wound like that didn't bother him one bit.

He liked to make trouble in jail, too... if the guards even tried to rough him up a little he'd snap his goddamn cuffs in two and calmly say, "Oops, they just came apart. Could've hurt somebody. Gimme a new pair."

And then the big lout'd just smile at the guard.

Of course he stirred up trouble inside a buncha times, and I can't tell ya how much of a headache it was cleaning up after him every time.

Tell you the truth, there wasn't an inmate in the place who could beat him, and they were all so scared of him they couldn't tell the guards about the stuff he did. I guess he was sorta like a king inside his prison...

And then, one day.

He started a ruckus in the mess hall. Said the guy sitting in front of him had laughed at 'im or something. Started a fight over that.

We took our clubs and surrounded him and he calmed down, but... Anyway, there were warders stationed at the firing windows behind him with their sights on his back, so of course he'd simmer down.

I decided I'd say something.

I felt a bit like a sadist, but yeah, anyway, uhh, I kinda talked down to 'em, feelin' pretty good inside.

"You want to take a trip to Alcatraz? Any of you guys wants to run wild on an island with no books, no newspapers, keep on exercising, be my guest."

Yeah, like that.

Anyway, even Gustavo had to know the rumors about that place. Some of the others shut right up too, looking scared.

Yeah, up till then I was walking on clouds.

It was great. I almost felt like the world was my oyster.

And then it happened.

"Alcatraz...?"

A man started walking toward me.

Yeah, Ladd.

"What would you have to do to get carted off there?"

I was actually a little surprised. I didn't even think a model prisoner who always kept his mouth shut'd suddenly decide to chat it up with a guard who had his club out.

See, usually we tried to keep talk between guards and inmates to a minimum... some prisons banned conversation outright. But I gave him a reply. Ladd looked like he didn't know what Alcatraz was, and I thought it'd be a great chance to scare some of the dumber inmates who didn't know either.

So I told him. About what a scary place Alcatraz was. I exaggerated a little.

I'm telling ya, I was still feeling good then, watching how he shut up...

"So anyway, we're thinking of sending the worst inmate over there, so chickens like you can just keep your heads down and stay model inmates, got it?"

That's what I told him.

And then...

And then, well... umm... what happened was...

He grinned.

It was a real ear to ear thing. Like this, like he couldn't keep the excitement inside him...

The hell is this guy? The moment I laid eyes on that smile, I got a real bad feeling.

He wasn't even looking at me anymore. He turned around without a word and went back to his seat, finishing up his food like Gustavo'd never started that trouble.

I tell ya, right then, I felt something... a real bad feeling, in my heart. Really, it was like... I can't even describe it. It was just a bad feeling. Like that feeling you get when you're standing on a really high bridge and suddenly think, "Ah, what'd happen to me if this bridge suddenly disappeared?" The way your whole body shrivels up on itself.

But I wasn't on a bridge, not standing on a roof. Just inside a prison. He was an inmate. I was a guard. I shouldn't have felt terror like that, but...

No doubt about it, I felt terrified seeing his smile.

It was that night when the terror became reality.

I heard there was another big fight in the mess hall and I went there...

Whaddya think I saw?

...Food.

...He was eating his food.

Ladd was sitting there quietly, eating his food. It was mealtime.

I thought I'd go crazy right then and there, I was so scared.

What was so scary?

Well, you see... what I'm trying to say is.

He was eating his food.

Ladd was eating, alone, surrounded by dozens of inmates, all of them moaning in pain!

The hallway connecting the mess hall to the cell block was filled with the inmates who weren't laid out cold, all trembling with fear.

The guys who'd been standing guard were all frozen where they stood, just staring at Ladd like they'd seen something outta this world.

"Hey! What the hell happened here...?!" I shouted to the other guards.



You can laugh at me if you want, but I didn't wanna talk to Ladd himself. It was too scary... The sight of that guy just sitting there eating in a situation like that gave me the creeps.

There were already guards who'd come after hearing about the fight like me, standing at the firing windows with rifles ready... but they were just looking at each other. I mean, who were they gonna shoot?

Usually, when there's a big prison fight, the guys who win beat it to their cells and try to come up with an alibi at least. Say that Ladd just came after the fight was over and decided to start eating... Yeah, how great it'd be if that was the case.

But think of it. To beat up dozens of inmates like that, you'd need more'n one or two on your side, too. It didn't look like they'd all beat the shit outta each other and everyone knocked everyone else out at the same time or something...

...

Yeah, I know. I know whatcha want to say.

I thought the same thing the moment I saw it too, see.

That Ladd, the guy who was sitting and eating his food as calm as you please, had clobbered all the rough-looking guys scattered around him.

I thought to myself there was no way that could've happened, over and over, but the scene before my eyes just didn't change. No, not just the sight in front of me. That smile he'd shown me earlier that day made that impossible conclusion... the thought of him beating up all those other inmates by himself, float up in my head.

And then... something happened that only served to support that crazy thought.

Suddenly, a huge shadow burst up from among the fallen prisoners.

"Rraaaaaaaaaaagh! You fuckin' brat!!"

Didn't even need to look at 'im. Wasn't an inmate in the place big as that, except for Gustavo.

He was huge, but still fast, and strong as an ox too.

Seeing him charging forward, it looked like the perfect attack.

I almost thought he was a bear or something.

He lifted a nearby table with one hand.

Can you believe it!

A table, I'm tellin' ya! A goddamn table!

A guy who can swing around a chair one-handed's strong, so what does that make him? The bastard just grabbed a long table made for seating four, and waved it around like a stick!

"Imonnasmashaaaaaaa!"

I could hardly make out what he was yellin', but he lifted that table and then swung it down straight at Ladd, who'd just finished up his soup.

Now Ladd's head would crack like an egg and that'd be it for him. Then all that'd be left was for the guards at the windows to shout a warning, and once Gustavo gave up we'd beat him down with our clubs. If he resisted we'd give him a few more breathing holes and that'd be that.

...That's what I should've been thinking, but try as I might I couldn't even start to imagine it.

And nothing even remotely like that happened anyway.

I heard this splintering noise. The table in Gustavo's hand snapped in half, like a pencil. Clean in two in the blink of an eye, just like that.

But... Ladd wasn't there anymore.

He'd darted in... between Gustavo's body and the table. Getting hit by that table would've been deadlier than a bullet, but he just smiled that smile he'd shown me earlier that day and dodged it like it was child's play.

And then, he... he grinned.

What? Wasn't he grinning before? Well, yeah, but...

What I mean is... his grin started getting wider.

Gustavo stopped dead, surprised, seeing Ladd suddenly appear right in front of him.

And Ladd... didn't take that golden chance to hit him.

He just shrugged, palms up, and talked to us.

"This counts as self-defense, right?"

After that... well, tell you the truth, it was over in an instant.

Gustavo must've taken it as a personal insult. He raised his other hand, the veins pulsing clearly on the back, and at that moment... Ladd's hand found its way to his solar plexus...

And just like that, he belted Gustavo.

Gustavo musta weighed at least twice what he did, but Ladd punched him square in the stomach and, just like this... sent him flying, like he'd pushed him.

Gustavo actually flew.

He went shooting a few yards through the air and came crashing down, and as he touched down he threw up blood and stayed still where he was.

I'm telling you, he didn't move.

That guy was built like a bear, and he went out cold from one hit... just one punch.

I thought for sure Ladd'd used his metal arm. Then we could take it away from him and the world'd be right again.

But... but, goddammit.

He hit Gustavo with his right hand, the normal one, not his prosthetic... Now that I think of it, there's no way he'd be able to hit someone like that with a fake arm, his shoulder'd have dislocated itself.

Yeah... so then what happened was...

He walked slowly up to me, as I stood there dumbfounded, and said something.

"Life's long."

He said it like I was a friend he'd known for years!

According to the rules, I should've raised my club and shouted at him not to move. If I had a gun I might've drawn it. Yeah, I know, even though all he'd done was walk at me.

"Life's a long thing! You think so too, don'tcha?"

I couldn't understand a word of what he was saying, no, shouting, in a voice that echoed in the hall.

I wondered what he was trying to say... though instead of being curious, I was scared out of my wits. If I had to describe it, it was like a primal instinct inside me was warning me to be afraid of this man.

Run away, it told me. Run away run away run run run run run run run run.

"I've seen a lot of guards around here, but... out of all the guards in this prison, you're the one farthest away from death, wouldn't ya say?"

He talked slowly, his words creeping over me.

Every time that voice made my eardrums vibrate, the warning alarm inside me rang along with it.

Run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away run away  
run away run run run run run run run run run run run run run run  
runrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrunrun... you're gonna die!

The guards around me looked like they were waiting for my signal. Dammit, like I'd have the composure to do that! You chumps with the rifles, shoot already! That's what I was thinking right then, but well, all he'd done was walk to me. If they shot him there'd be news articles all over the place about human rights or something.

..But thinking it over... I think that it still woulda been better if someone had just shot him dead right then and there.

...Ah, take that part just now out of the recording.

Mmm, where was I... yeah. So he walked up to me and started "analyzing" me in a loud voice.



"No, don't think I mean you're destined to live the longest or anything... What I'm talking about is your state of mind. It's like the thought of dying is really far away from your brain... You always think something like this, don't you? 'I'm the ruling class of this prison. I hold the lives of the inmates in my hands. I'm safe. I'm not gonna die'. The other guards look like they're thinking, 'I might die at any time if the inmates start a riot' but you, you're downright leisurely. You deserve a commendation!"

He didn't hate me. He wasn't angry with me, but... dammit, he wanted to kill me.

I felt it for sure, that murderous feeling.

"You know what my hobby is? It's waking people like you up."

I'm gonna die. He's gonna kill me. My head was filled with those thoughts, but I couldn't do a thing, not a single thing! Terror! Froze! My legs!

As I stood there, unable to move a muscle, he smiled again as he talked.

He, he leaned close and whispered in my ear, all friendly!

"It's teaching people like you... that death is a lot closer than you think..."

...Ah, sorry. I lost it for a bit there.

I still can't stop trembling whenever I think of it.

If you just hear about it, it sounds like a simple punk's threat. But coming from his mouth it was... well. It felt real. Yeah, that's it, it felt real.

Like it wasn't a threat, but he was just saying what he thought, purely, like a kid...

Huh? So what happened?

Of course he went to solitary. Solitary punishment, that is, stuck in an empty room with nothing behind the door except a toilet. No blanket, of course. Compared to other jails, our solitary was on the comfortable side - it even had lights, but still it was a place where spending even a week there would start driving you up the wall.

Ladd spent ten days there.

But I quit my job before he got out.

Like I was running away... It usually ain't so easy to quit being a prison guard, but I told 'em I'd been sick for a while and argued my way out.

I wanted to get the fuck outta dodge before Ladd got out no matter what it took, see.

...Him? I hear he ended up getting shipped off to Alcatraz.

...You know Al Capone? Yeah, Ladd entered Alcatraz almost together with him, so I guess you could say he's an old-timer there... though it's only been a few months, even then.

I don't know how much left he's got left on his sentence. If he doesn't have any murder charges, he might be out on the streets in just a year or two...!

So that's, that's, why.

That's why I'm scared.

Hey, do, do I, do I look a little s-s-scared?

D-do I look like I, I'm scared of dyin?

I-i-it, it, it feels like he-he-he-he-he, that guy, Ladd, he's c-c-c-coming, coming f-for me...

Look, answer me!

I! I'm scared, ain't I!

It might be tomorrow! I look like I'm scared I might die right now, don't I?!

If I don't think like that then he he'll come he'll appear in my goddamn dreams with that goddamn smile and he's gonna smash my right eye! My left eye! Damn it all! My legs! Arms! Body! My head! Even when there's nothing left anymore he won't be satisfied he'll crush something something that don't even have a form anymore though my body don't even exist anymore he'll smash it and smash it and smash it and what the hell is he hitting anyway! Please forgive me I'm scared I'm scared I tell you I'm gonna die I'm scared I'm scared I'm scared an' no matter how much I scream and scream and screamscreamscream hiseyeshisvoicewontleavemyhead ...

aaah!!!

...I'm okay. Yeah, I'm fine.

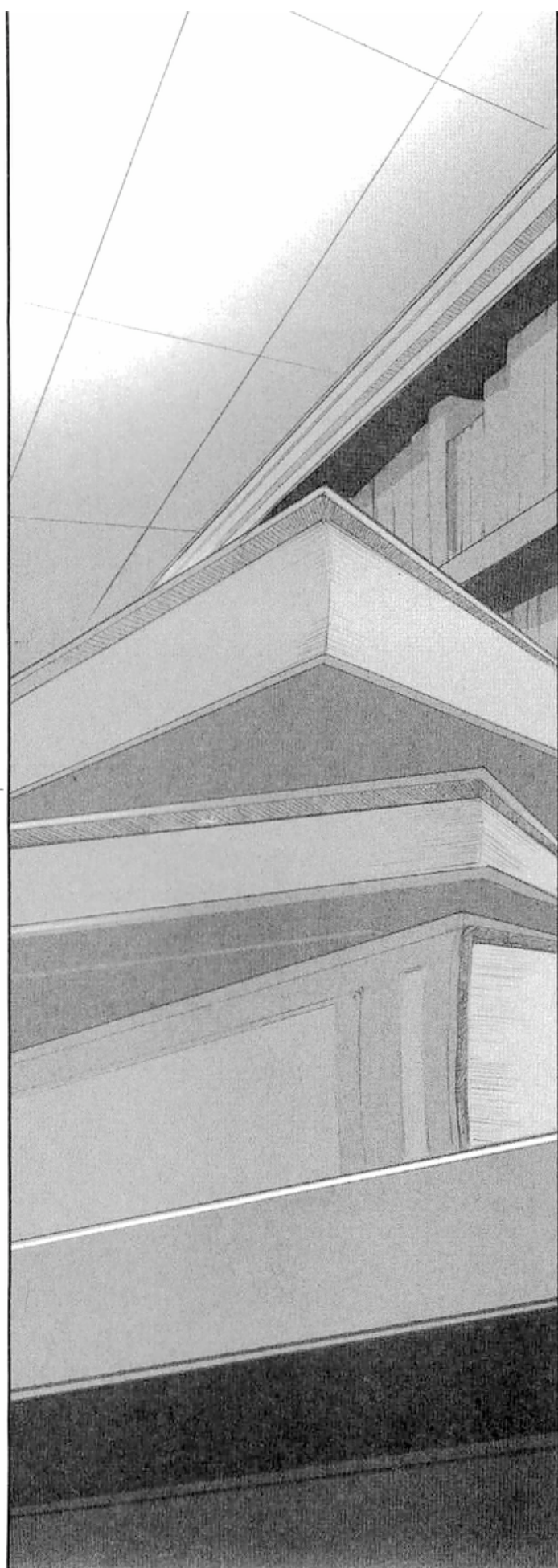
Booze. Gimme some booze.

Booze, booze, booze booze booze... booze... what? Too much drinking is bad for me? You damn idiot, there's no way something piddly like drinking would...

...

No, you're right, it could kill me. No, of course it'll kill me.

Okay, right. Dying is scary, I'm scared of dying, I'm scared... Yeah? Right, right? That's how it is, ain't it? Right...?



プロローグⅢ

暗殺者



## Prologue 3 : Assassin

(Basement of Nebula Headquarters, Chicago)

It was a strange room.

It would be more apt to describe how it was furnished, than just to say that it was a room.

Documents and books lined one whole wall, and many of the articles were strewn upon a table. Many had fallen to the floor. Among these books were scattered microscopes and other strange equipment, making the room look like it was a laboratory or a storage room for a lab.

It would look like an abandoned room if not for the people scurrying to and fro, some jotting down notes and others answering the many ringing phones. Everyone was occupied with something.

“Arrrgh, what to do....”

A woman with glasses was muttering to herself and turning circles in this chaos, and tripped over a book.

“Whoops.” Documents flew and her colleagues stood gaping.

The room looked like a university lab, but...

In a corner of the room, separated by a thin partition, loomed a completely different atmosphere.

A young man in a suit was sitting on a chair. His hands were folded upon the table, and his gaze was trained upon one corner of the room, which was very dark because the curtains had been drawn.

In the corner was a shadow, which was breathing very quietly, as if to hide any evidence of its existence.

Looking at this indistinct form, the young man sighed and said, “There’s really no need to hide that face of yours. Is it really that important? That you conceal your identity?”

But the shadow did not move, and remained silent.

The young man sighed again and seemed to give up, and changed the subject to work. “Oh, the favor we asked of you the other day... It’s not only an important operation, but it’s also pretty hard to complete. So that’s why we had to ask you.”

Still, the shadowy person didn’t respond.

“Oh, the operation’s called..... Huey Laforet.”

Even hearing this name, the shadow didn’t say anything.

“He’s in the famous Alcatraz Prison. And...supposedly he can’t die.”

The shadowy figure seem to be sobered at these words.

But the suited young man didn't notice any change, and continued in his casual tone. "... Not a joke. Hopefully you'd take this seriously. Also, since you've work here long enough, you might have seen some of these 'experimental subjects,' right?"

The figure still didn't say anything, only urged the man on with his gaze.

"Thank you. Well, this man here isn't quite like those subjects. He's already lived for 200 years, a veritable immortal. He's quite inscrutable, with many people working for him, and even in jail he's still commanding his forces outside."

"..."

"So you see, we had to let you deal with this immortal. Plus, this time it's not just a favour."

All the small talk done, he prepared to move into the heart of the matter. However, right then ---

"Excuse me, here's the tea ----Huh?!"

The woman in a white coat knocked into the partition, and screamed. She fell, and the tea and the tea set flew into the air.

"!?"

"!"

The two men realized what was going on at the same time. The suited young man got a teacup in his temple, while the form in the shadows retreated to avoid being scalded.

"Oh no."

"Oh dear, I'm so sorry! Sorry! Are you all right?" The woman looked like she was on the verge of tears, and kept bowing and apologizing. Above the white coat was an absent-minded face, with a pair of glasses with thick black rims. Long bangs swung before her forehead. In contrast, her figure under the white clothes was quite attractive. Every time she lowered her head, her amazing chest would attract attention, even though it was hidden under plain clothes. Any other man would have been overjoyed to see this, however—

The man in the suit only looked at her coldly, and then turned to the man in the shadows as if nothing had happened.

"You can ask this woman for more information."

"Hmm? What information?" the woman was puzzled.

The man in the suit was starting to show some irritation. "The affairs we were talking about this morning, Director Renée!"

Upon hearing a tone of accusation from her staff, the woman clapped her hands together.

It was hard to tell just looking, but the chief of this section was this woman in white – Renée Palamedes Branvillier. She looked again at the shadow, realized who it was, and bowed politely.



“Oh wow, we haven’t seen each other for so long! If I’d known earlier, I would have prepared some refreshments and stuff.”

Seeing her acting so hospitable, the man in the suit dropped his collected expression completely, and massaged his temple. “...but it was you who told me to meet him this morning!”

“Oh, ri—right. Sorry. Um, I didn’t think you’d actually get here this early...”

The suited man could only sigh at his superior’s apologetic demeanor. The shadowy man maintained his somber silence.

Renée realized that no one was going to continue berating her, and raised her head to say brightly, “Well then, where did you two get to?”

“We were just outlining his trip to Alcatraz. Whatever the case, we need to hand this Huey affair to him.”

Hearing his glum words, Renée only clapped once again, and said to the shadow, “Ah, right, right! We need to ask you to work on this. From Huey Laforet, we need to...”

Her voice was always chirpy like this, free of care and hesitation.

“What I want from him is one of his eyes.”

“Well then, we’re leaving this to you, Mr. Felix Walken!”

The man in the suit cringed at his superior’s loud voice, and interrupted. “Please, could you stop yelling his name like that!”

“Oh nooooo, I’m so sorry!”

She quickly clapped her hands over her mouth. The man in the shadows sighed – he finally opened his mouth for something.

“Please do not make me repeat this again. That name has already been allotted to someone else.” And saying this, the shadowy figure rose and stalked towards the hall.

“Right right. Well then, sorry, um, Mr. Assassin!”

“Don’t yell out his occupation either!”

“Aarrgh, I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

This was the ninth operation that the shadowy figure had been entrusted with. And he did not ask exactly what that room was for. Nebula had many departments, and commanded many organizations all over America, but it was a mystery as to what Renée’s department was up to, or why they were working in such an out of the way room in that building. Any ordinary person would have wondered about this, but for the shadowy it wasn’t of any concern.



Her unchanging voice rang out behind him. The shadowy figure only pondered about Renée.

She really didn't look like a vile character. Of course, most vile characters don't go out doing evil things while admitting that they were evil. Even if Renée was up to no good, she was still different from other people who were up to no good.

She lives a naïve existence, the shadowy figure concluded. She lived without malice, but lived innocently of all evil, which could still send her to hell.

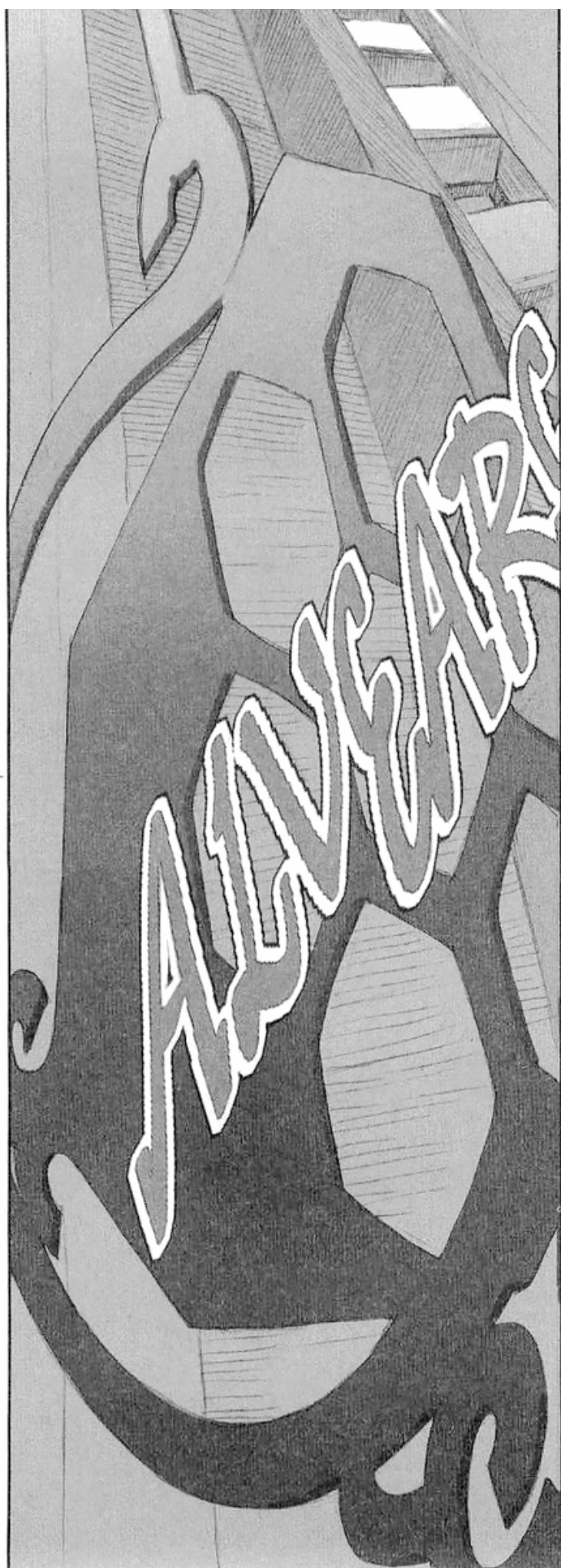
He had seen her conduct experiments on corpses. When he asked her where she stole the bodies from, she immediately protested. "No way, they're not stolen!"

Without hesitation, she injected something into her own wrist, and said, "They were paid for, you know!" And she was happily grinning all the while.

Proactive, confident, focused; in these ways, she was a stereotypical scientist in a lab coat.

He heard her call something out. The man called Felix, still expressionless, disappeared into the end of the hallway.

The chaos back there was really a daily occurrence in this world.



フロロークⅣ

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## Prologue 4 : Unspecified Time

Inside the Alveare, New York

A strange conversation rang through the honey-scented interior of the Alveare.

“That’s what I’m saying! Haha, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Haha!”

“Romeo and Hamlet!”

“Right, so, because the officer said ‘My name is Johan,’ I said ‘Sorry, got wrong person,’ and walked out all composed-like.”

“What a jumble!”

The hanger-ons started to whistle and cheer the proud couple.

“Do you guys do this all the time?”

“You really got that cop eh?”

Facing an adoring crowd, the couple didn’t pay any attention to any holes in their story.

“Uh huh, even though we escaped, they were chasing us already, but we were too fast for them!”

“Yay! Youth wins!”

The semi-drunk crowd interrupted them with more questions. “So really, all you did was run away...?”

“Well, it was like this. Don’t you think it’s totally impressive that we could run away just by running?”

“What genius! What skill!”

“Oh well, I guess that’s enough about us. You know, you guys are awesome too. For many things.”

The crowd laughed in surprise and ordered another drink. Although the stories this couple was telling (and the couple themselves) were insane, they were great for washing down more liquor.

It was about a year after the end of the Prohibition. In 1929, after the stocks crashed on Wall Street, voices nation-wide protested the Prohibition. They complained, “The country’s taken away our livelihood,” and demonstrated for the restoration of alcohol manufacture and sales.

To make matters worse, the Prohibition had made black markets and speakeasies thrive. So it became even more urgent for the government to find and crack down on those illegal operations, and curb their power and influence. And with all the voices calling for the end of the Prohibition, it was finally abolished. But these speakeasies, which could only operate in secret before, suddenly found that they could do legitimate business and flaunt themselves before the public.

But then again, since most of those bars prospered because of the Prohibition, scores now found themselves bankrupt.

But the Alveare was an old and reputable establishment, and was thus sheltered from the storm of intense competition. Other than wine and spirits, it offered its own unique honey fare, and so the numbers of patrons rose rather than fell. It had been refurnished and looked even busier than during the Prohibition. The staff increased too, and you could see Lia and other wait staff strolling between the tables.

One couple stood out among all of these guests – though you could also say the pair fit right in.

Isaac Dian and Miria Harvent.

Everyone there knew those two names. But then again, their names were totally at odds with how they dressed themselves up.

No one really knew what they were up to - well, no one really knew what the store proprietor and the Camorra were up to either - but then again, no one really cared. Whether they came to announce their heroics or bemoan their losses, the other customers just took all of it as part of the entertainment package the Alveare offered.

The pair had paused in their storytelling and was taking a break, sipping some juice. But then an unfamiliar voice said quietly, “Well, you guys are awesome. Do you think you could tell us again?”

A middle-aged man with a beard smiled warmly at the two.

“Everyday, you guys go on about your thieving exploits all over the country...if you keep on going, you’d be really famous.”

Isaac and Miria didn’t register his mocking tone at all. “No way! Our disguise is flawless. No one’d recognize us.”

“Crimes have to be thorough! Edgar Allen Poe!”

It was a totally nonsensical response. People who didn’t interact regularly with Isaac and Miria would probably feel headachy. But the middle-aged man smiled and sat down to chat.

“Haha, my man, your disguise really is exceptional. But I don’t think it’s as simple as you say. A few years ago, there was a notice in the paper, ‘Peculiar: mummy robber.’ That wouldn’t have been you, would it? It was like this: a man wrapped head to toe in bandages, accompanied by a woman wearing a coat over her bandages, stole all of the cash in the bank.”

Isaac’s eyes bulged at this detailed description. “Wooow, we were in the paper for that?”

“This means someone took a photo of us!”

“I thought it was just a photographer, and he ended up being a reporter! Uh-oh, Miria, Someone out there’s craftier than we are!”

“Phantom thief! Arsene Lupin!”

In response to this again nonsensical response, the middle-aged man only kept asking questions.

“Well then, what about this? The ones who cleaned out the Genoard mansion were...”

“Uh-uh, we can’t tell you that!”

“It’s a secret! Even to lawyers!”



“Well, all right, let’s drop whether you stole anything for the moment. Tell me what disguises you were using.”

The man kept smiling, but Isaac frowned, trying to remember. “Oh right right, it was Indians right? Indians?”

“With the wiiiiiiide fields behind us.”

They looked so happy and innocent that the man smiled even more. “Well, what about scattering money along the streets of New York?”

“Yeah, we totally remember that time. We dressed up as a Father and a Sister.”

“I was the Sister!”

“Hahaha, really. Well then...”

And the man proceeded to ask them about all of their adventures, such as the stolen art gallery doors. And the stolen chocolate. And stealing underclothes, and hitting Russo members in Chicago with a home run, etc...

And the man was smiling warmly all the while.

“Impressive. You two really are awesome.” And he applauded. Isaac started to blush.

“Hahaha, no no...well...we’d start to bore you soon...how about you tell some stories!”

“Reciprocate! Return the favour! Make up for everything we’re told you!”

The man maintained his friendly expression, and started chatting as if to old friends. “All right, all right. I’ll tell you a bit about me. Hm...what about you come with me to my establishment?”

“Ooo, you own your own business.”

“That’s so cool!”

“Haha, it’s really not that exceptional.”

At the man’s words, several customers – those who didn’t look like the rest – turned to look at him. The mood of the conversation seemed to change.

But Isaac and Miria didn’t seem to notice this at all.

“Uh oh. You know, Miria, we were so caught up with housecleaning this morning we left our wallet behind.”

“Oh no! We’re penniless!”

“It’s probably still there, so could you go and get it?”

“Right! You wait right here, Isaac!”

Miria jumped up and disappeared into the crowds of customers. The middle-aged man smiled at her retreating figure.

“That’s right.” This answer was composed and unlike Isaac’s usual tone. He also watched Miria disappear.

“Well then, shall we go? To your joint.”

Isaac saw the surprise on the man's face and leaned over to pat him on the shoulder.

“!”

At Isaac's words, the whole place gasped and swivelled their heads to stare. Regarding Isaac guessing the man's identity – all the customers, especially the Camorra among them, were surprised: "We all noticed from the start that he was a policeman, so Isaac actually noticed it too?"

“Ay, well, it’s because I’m used to how you guys talk. And I’d scamper like I usually do, but that would cause trouble for this place. I’d feel bad about that...”

Isaac merely responded to these questions with a perplexed expression, and started to rock himself back and forth in his chair. Meanwhile, two men appeared, as if they were Isaac's entourage – one was short and fat, and the other was tall and thin.

“She’s really something. Shot through the back just now like a bullet.”

“!”

Upon hearing these words, a man seated at a distance rose and made moves to chase after her, blundering between tables. But the middle-aged man waved his hand and said, “Never mind.” The man stopped in his tracks and looked back, disgusted.

“Getting her to run away first...not bad, not bad...”

The man sensed that the other customers frowned on him now, and decided to put the place behind him. “I want you to come with me and spit everything out. Everything.”

A few minutes later, Miria entered uncertainly through the back door. “Hey Isaac! Isaac, I couldn’t find your wallet anywhere...D’you think it’s been stolen?”

Seeing her ask around the room unawares, the Camorra, some of the customers, and the wait staff all looked troubled.

“What’s going on? Where’s Isaac? Did he go to the bathroom?”

Miria registered the change in the atmosphere, and realized something bad happened. Her face fell as she looked around at everyone.

“Isaac...? Hey...where’d he go...? Where...?”

This was the day that Isaac Dian was arrested.

Supposedly, the policeman who arrested Isaac had been listening to all their heroic thieving deeds for quite a while now. But it was puzzling that this arrest wasn’t reported in the papers at all, nor did anyone hear of a trial date. The whole thing seemed like a huge practical joke.

This was about a month before Firo Prochainezo was arrested for destruction of public property.

And so lifted the curtains of time...



第一章表

刑務所に行こう



## Chapter 1 - Part 1 : Let's Go to Prison

The island used to be a city.

Floating off San Francisco, its area didn't even amount to 1 km squared.

It was mostly rock. They surrounded the island in precipices, and within their circle was a crude concrete building.

This isle had been called a demonic island, and the atmosphere on the island was indeed gloomy.

It had never been developed for human habitation, not until the time of the Gold Rush. Then it functioned as a guard house for the port of San Francisco. During the Civil War, it was installed with 111 cannons and the then newly invented Rodman cannon, turning it into a sea fort. And used as a prison for Confederate sympathizers.

When it was no longer needed as a stronghold, it was converted into a prison for war criminals, among whom were Hopi Native Americans.

It was designed so enemies couldn't get in, which was also perfect for preventing prisoners from getting out. At the start of the century, it had been converted into an official military prison. In 1933, it was transferred from the military to the judicial branch of the government, and it became known as the most secure federal prison in the United States.

"Escape is impossible."

This simple but intimidating warning made all the prisoners shake in their shoes, and reassured the rest of the world. Yes, Alcatraz was part of the world, but it was completely cut off.

From then on, Alcatraz would be the setting of many films, remodelled again and again in the imagination. Except for "Escape is impossible" – in everyone's mind, this was a deeply rooted and incontrovertible fact.

As if to prove this, the fearsome and mysterious Al Capone was transferred there in August of 1933. The tales surrounding Alcatraz would never end. Even today, it sits like a king in San Francisco Bay.

And today, a vessel approached the island. Under the blue sky, the island could almost be beautiful. Who knows how many hopes and ambitions the boat carried?

(Transport boat, San Francisco Bay, December 1934)

"...this frickin' sucks."

"Watch your mouth," the expressionless guard warned Firo.

The swaying of the boat made Firo reflect on his situation. He had heard that escaping Alcatraz was impossible, but sensational rumours like "everyone who goes in goes mad" and "the wardens experiment on inmates" and so forth all cropped up too. Before, when he heard people say such things, he'd always laughed them off. But seeing the island loom over the ocean, he couldn't help but recall them now.

It wasn't that the island looked particularly frightening; in fact, just the opposite. From the dock, Firo could see the prison atop the cliff-like rocks, surrounded by other facilities dotting the island. The flora on the island blended into the architecture between the blue sky and turquoise water, as picturesque as any painting.

Because the place looked so fantastical, Firo thought, nothing would seem out of the ordinary. And, like it or not, Firo had become an immortal already. From examining the island from afar, Firo could at least come up with an objection next time someone said that the island housed a slumbering dragon.

And he was about to become a part of its legend.

...well, this sucks.

The swaying of the boat made Firo let out an inadvertent curse. The boat skittered along at a very quick speed. It wasn't even the speed – the boat kept lunging up and down and side to side. He had heard that the waves were pretty rough here. Guess that was true.

If there was an opening he supposed he could jump into the ocean to escape, though he would likely be shot. As Firo was immortal, he had been considering jumping anyway. But the waves were so rough that he'd probably lose consciousness sink to the bottom of the ocean, and never come back up. Although the shore seemed close, Firo knew that he would probably feel differently when actually swimming through the water.

How the heck did I end up here?

Nonplussed, Firo recalled the faces of those police agents, and how this all came to be.

A week ago.

"Well well, aren't you glad we took so much effort to get you such special treatment? Normally, you don't get to land on Alcatraz the first time you're caught. The place is usually reserved for transfers from other prisons. This time, we really had to ask some favours for you, you know. I'd even allow a lowly scumbag such as yourself to thank us."

"Hey, wait. Wait, that's enough. Wait." Firo sat in the interrogation room, waving his cuffed hands for a chance to speak. "Ok, since your logic is so baffling, let me clarify some stuff. First, why? Second, why me? Third, do I really have to go?"

Victor ignored this request to clarify, and immediately answered, "Why, don't you feel honoured?"

"Huh?"

"See, people would immediately take their hats off to you for coming out of Alcatraz. Of course, for upstanding people like us, it's a disgrace, but for your kind...it's an honour."

"...that would depend on context. For me, going off to jail without a proper trial or anything is a disgrace. And for the Martillo family, likewise a disgrace."

Victor just seemed amused that Firo was finally expressing his true feelings. "Well then. What about making you the pride of all Alcatraz? For someone like you, with such a cute baby face and

everything, you'd definitely be welcomed with open arms. Then again, the Chief Warden's a rather capable guy, and strict. He probably won't let you establish yourself."

"...Edward, how about we kill this guy?"

"My apologies, Firo, he's an immortal too, you know."

Firo felt a little helpless as Victor started to laugh his head off. If he was the same person he had been before, he'd long since run over, clapped his right hand over Victor's head, and contentedly listened to the other man beg for his life.

And at this, Firo fully realized his situation. If he was the same person he had been before? It was true. Compared to before, he was utterly different now.

Before he first joined the Camorra, along with his friends, the Gandor brothers, he'd only seen Claire Stanfield as a worthy opponent. Then, it was only when he was defeated by Yagmal, the Japanese man, that he was initially acquainted with the Martillo family. It was part of the larger Camorra network, and Firo was content with his position. Perhaps if he had stayed on, even some of his animosity towards the world would have mellowed out, who knows.

And then, it was all changed, by – perhaps by meeting Ennis, Isaac, and Miria.

He wouldn't have called himself a do-gooder, but he wouldn't say that he was wicked, either. The face of each Camorra member swam before his mind's eye, and he couldn't help but smile, a bit bitterly. And the bastard Victor had to open his mouth and ruin the moment.

"This is why you've been detained by the authorities."

"Huh?"

"Didn't we mention something about an Ennis person?"

"...What about her?" Hearing the name of the woman he loved, Firo's heart gave a little squeeze.

"Did you know...she's devoured an alchemist?"

Firo knew, of course. He could remember this incident from Szilard's memories, and Ennis had told him herself. When Szilard had been using Ennis as an unfeeling tool, she had eaten an alchemist that Szilard meant to eat. Ennis had only been aware of herself in a limited sense before, but this was the catalyst that eventually filled her with human feelings and a sense of morality, and in the end created feelings of remorse – which paved the road for today.

Even though it was a long time ago and should be forgotten, for Ennis it was still an event she regretted.

What did this man intend, picking at this old wound?

Seeing Firo stare at him, Victor lowered his eyes and said, "The alchemist she swallowed – he was a friend."

Firo couldn't help his bulging his eyes at this response. He understood now where Victor was headed, but this also brought up many new questions.

“So what...are you out for revenge, and you want to kill Ennis?” His voice was filled with anxiety and a kind of determination. If Victor gave the wrong answer, then the anger Firo had repressed would be rekindled, and he would definitely devour the man before him. While he waited for the other man to respond, he adjusted his breathing so as to react quickly and jump forwards.

Victor, however, was in no rush. He paused for a moment, and spoke slowly and deliberately. “Well...no, I never considered revenge. If I did, I’d have already eaten you by now, and Huey too. I’d never consider doing something that evil old Szilard would think of.”

“...really?”

“However, my mind is never at ease, thinking of the woman who swallowed my friend. Even I know that she was just Szilard’s tool, I can’t let this go. And ultimately, I suspect that she’s killed other people too.”

“...what did you say?”

Although Firo was frowning, Victor continued as peacefully as before. “The people she killed under the old man’s command couldn’t possibly have only been immortals. As for evidence, we found countless skeletons in Szilard’s hideout. Even though we don’t yet know who killed them, as soon as we determine that it’s Ennis – what should we do about this woman, who isn’t even a registered citizen?”

“You...” Firo clenched his teeth and glared at Victor, but Victor only smiled humourlessly.

“Well, I guess Ennis’s... ‘guardian’ is you now, isn’t it? So that’s why we can apply a life sentence on you.”

“...what do you mean?”

“If you do as we say...we won’t press charges against Ennis.”

“What, weren’t you just saying how despicable shady dealings are in the criminal world? Why so eager to copy us now?”

“We aren’t asking you to betray your comrades. Your target is still our common enemies. We just want you to do a bit of investigation. As to the details, we’ll discuss them once you accept our terms.”

“Well, you hate us criminal organizations. What’s the guarantee you’d keep your word?”

Victor’s smile disappeared, and he leaned towards Firo. “I give you my promise, and that is the only thing I can do. Whether you believe me or not is up to you.”

Although Firo was handcuffed, he could still reach over and place his right hand on Victor’s head. However, he didn’t lift a finger. From Victor radiated an imposing aura, exactly like the higher-ups in the Camorra that Firo was familiar with, like Maiza, Ronny, and Yagmal, and of course Don Molsa Martillo. Long experience with such people had shaped certain responses in Firo, and he couldn’t move at all.

Victor sensed that Firo was now covered with a thin layer of cold sweat. He only said, “We’ll drop the charges against Ennis. With the power and authority of a federal agent, I can only make you this promise.”



After three days of contemplation, Firo accepted this arrangement with a sense of resignation.

Although he was suffering for Ennis's sake, he thought that after three days, someone in the Camorra would have thought of a way to rescue him. But after three days, nothing happened.

Maybe his complete isolation was all arranged secretly, by a secret branch of a judicial system. It worked. Maybe he could count on Ronny, who was full of surprises, to think of something, but Firo decided that such blind hope didn't suit his character.

As time went slowly by, his friends and Ennis would be sure to worry – and he couldn't let that continue. To end this weird charade, Firo had to agree to Victor's terms.

And so, he found himself on this swaying boat. But he wasn't cursing the fact that he had to submit to Victor's threats. Rather, it was his assigned task: to observe Huey Laforet.

Although it sounded like an important assignment, to Firo he had sunk to being a mere watchdog for the government, and felt disgraced to the depth of his heart. Well, even if he was a watchdog, Firo had to admit that he found this Huey character intriguing.

A year ago, Ennis had met a secret group of "vampires." They called Ennis their little sister, and kept mentioning the name of an alchemist, which was Huey Laforet. Henceforth, Firo became interested.

Even though Firo had some clues from Szilard's memories, Huey Laforet's existence was still a mystery. Other than someone called Elmer C. Albatross, with whom Huey was on good terms, there seemed to be no more leads. Szilard wasn't like Victor, who wouldn't have had many opportunities to meet this man in his long life. Firo had the distinct sense that Szilard knew Huey but wanted to forget him on purpose.

Firo didn't like exploring Szilard's memories in detail, so he settled on learning more about Huey as Firo Prochainezo.

"What? You don't have any information on his guy, even though he's in jail? For matters of national intelligence, you ought to know more than me, and yet you don't. There's your superiority."

"We already spoke to the wardens. We'll place you near Huey by saying that we need to keep you in a private room. Regarding what you'd specifically be doing, we'll let you know in good time."

This was probably the most encouraging statement that Victor had made so far. Firo didn't trust him, and didn't like him, but he couldn't help but feel more engaged now – his fighting spirit was back.

But maybe his fighting spirit could deal with only one boat trip.

When he was finally about to board the boat, the guard beside him, who had been impassive before, said softly into his ear, "Sorry to make you wait, Mr. Firo Prochainezo."

Was this the mole the bureau placed inside the prison?

"Master Huey has been eagerly awaiting your arrival."

The guard sounded so humble and polite. Firo shuddered and started to sweat.

"Master Huey is very happy to have a fellow immortal come to accompany him at last..."

“...hey...”

“Hey! No talking here!” The guard snapped back to his earlier demeanour as soon as Firo started to speak. Firo felt like he was hallucinating, like the events leading up to this were all imaginary. He was being forced into this assignment totally unaware of what he was doing, but they wouldn’t let him ask any questions. And if they had gathered any intelligence on Huey, they didn’t tell him, that damn inspector...

So, sitting in the little boat, Firo could only repeat one thing to himself. Over and over, out loud, in his heart.

“Well, this sucks.”

とりあえず喧嘩を売ってみよう

第二章裏



## Chapter 1 - Part 2 : Let's Quarrel

(The Alveare, New York)

It was preparation time, before opening.

In the honey-scented air, a girl sat, forlorn. The staff of the Alveare, madam proprietor, and several members of the Martillo family bustled around the room, but around her, the air was sullen. And even though she looked like a young girl, she was decked out in unusual clothing – in a suit, like a man.

This was Ennis. She was supposedly an imperfect homunculus, created by the alchemist Szilard. When she betrayed her master, she had been prepared to die. However, a young immortal intervened and “devoured” the old alchemist, and so technically he became her new master.

“Firo...”

Ennis didn't subscribe to anything like an “organization.” And for her, this was the first time she had to go to his “family.” He accepted her even though they had been fighting against each other before, and even asked her to move in with him. Such a warm person. It was confusing at first, but over time, Firo became an integral part of Ennis's life.

But Firo – he was gone.

A week ago, Firo had been arrested by those self-proclaimed officers. After Ennis heard this news, her heart trembled as it had never done before.

Firo was definitely a part of the Martillo family. He'd toed the line between respectability and criminality, and perhaps had even crossed it on occasion. Ennis knew all of this. However, at least in front of Ennis, he had never shown his darker side, had always been an agreeable gentleman. And he had never hidden anything from her.

For someone like Ennis, who in many ways lacked even an instinct for self-preservation, Firo's role in her life was like a familiar family member. But faced with the possibility of never seeing Firo again, Ennis was forced to reconsider his place in her life.

But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stay calm and rational. It wasn't just Firo who was gone, but Isaac too. He was taken away a month ago, and had never been seen since. There hadn't been news of either of them. Perhaps both of them were being mistreated in prison at this minute.

And as for his partner, Miria Harvent. Everyone thought that she'd cry when she heard about Isaac, or even go into hysterics. But she stayed silent, and shuffled out of the Alveare. She hadn't come back since.

Although Ennis wasn't there at the time and didn't see Isaac being taken away, every time she thought of what Miria must have felt then, she felt choked up. Like Firo, Isaac and Miria were close friends who changed the course of her life.

Yet she could do nothing. Ennis felt useless and wretched, and no matter how hard she tried to stop, she kept turning these things over and over in her mind. And since she couldn't do anything else, she decided to think hard about what to do in the future. So Ennis chose the Alveare, to sit here all afternoon and think about –



“Ennis, are you all right?”

Many people around Ennis were really worried, seeing her so somber everyday, including Czeslaw Meyer, who was like Ennis’s younger brother.

“Oh. Czeslaw ...I’m fine. Just a bit out of it, that’s all.”

“If it’s about Firo, don’t be too worried.”

“Sorry...I should be more cheerful.”

“It’s ok. You don’t have to be worried, really. Everyone says so – for people like you, time isn’t an issue. And even if Firo is in prison, it’s not like he’d get sick or die or anything, right?”

Ennis smiled a little at how confident Czeslaw sounded, and when she answered, her voice was calm. “Right...Czeslaw...the same for you. Even though it’s been 200 years, we still see Maiza around.”

“Hm. Hmm...”

Ennis found this vague response odd, and coming from Czeslaw, it was disquieting. Ennis didn’t know how to answer. As she was about to clarify it with him, the voice of Saina, the proprietor, boomed from the back door.

“Apologies, sir. We ain’t open yet, you know.”

“Oh, no, I’m here to discuss something with the Martillos.” Answering her was a low masculine voice.

“Um...well then...did you set up an appointment?”

“Hey, please, don’t be so bureaucratic. Is that Maiza here or not? I’m an old friend, after all.”

Other than Ennis and Czeslaw, everyone else heard this exchange too, and turned to look towards the back door. He said Maiza. Not only was Maiza Avaro a long-time member of the Martillos, he was one of its higher-level members now. On the outside, he looked friendly and laid-back, but he knew his business and was held in high esteem.

And for Ennis and Czeslaw, he was important for other reasons, too –

“Why don’t you let me in first.”

“Hey, wait...” And as Ennis and Czeslaw watched, the man shouldered past the door as if Saina wasn’t there, and headed direction into the Alveare. What everyone saw was a bespectacled and thinly dressed man who wore a guarded expression and hostile eyes. The cheerful drinking atmosphere tensed.

Because of what happened to Isaac, everyone was on extra heightened alert regarding anyone from the law. But the man here made them feel so uncomfortable that they just wanted to retreat further back into their seats.

But there was someone here who was ten times more uncomfortable than everyone else.

“...Czeslaw.”

Czeslaw's expression hardened as he saw the man enter. Ennis knew immediately that this was no ordinary person, then. She glanced back at the man, but then stared.

She had definitely never met him before – but her reaction was rather like Firo's reaction a while ago.

He – he was...

Knowing something that you didn't know. What a bizarre feeling. And after you realized you do know, you really wish that you didn't. Ennis felt a sense of guilt overtake her. And the only person who could make her feel better wasn't around.

Some of Ennis's feelings must have showed on her face, but the man didn't pay any attention. Instead his gaze swept over the rest of the guests. Only belatedly did he recognize the still young man beside her.

"Oh, Czeslaw." His expression softened a bit, and his voice was quieter. "Well, long time no see. How long has it been? 233 years?"

Czeslaw remained as stiff as he was before, even though the man appeared to relax a bit. He could only force the other's name from his lips. "Victor..."

"Apologies for disturbing you before opening time, ma'am. I don't need you to seat me or serve anything." Victor thrust out an arm and stopped the waiter who was going to pour him a glass of water, stalked to Czeslaw and Ennis's table, and impertinently grabbed a nearby chair to sit without being asked.

"Long time no see. You still look well. That's the most important thing."

"Uh...um..."

Czeslaw was still guarded despite Victor's open expression. He rose and pushed his chair back to put some more distance between himself and Victor. Far enough so that his right hand wouldn't reach.

Although Czeslaw was an immortal, immortals still had a horror of being devoured. And Czeslaw perhaps was a bit more afraid of this than other immortals were. Ever since he had been betrayed by someone he trusted, Czeslaw had decided to be suspicious of any other immortal. Especially if they popped up before him out of nowhere.

"Um...What are you doing here...?"

"I need to discuss something with Maiza."

"You weren't surprised to see me. So...you knew I was here?"

"Hm? Well, of course I did."

His whereabouts had been discovered. Czes felt a shiver pass through him. He glanced at Victor's right hand, even more on guard now.

"Did you hear about me from the information brokers? Or did Maiza tell you?"



“Information brokers? You mean those guys at Daily Days? No, when they see cops, they clam up immediately. But I didn’t hear it from Maiza either. We haven’t met for about six or seven years now.”

“So how...?”

“That’s because I’ve ordered my men to watch you.”

Czeslaw frowned at this straightforward and simple response. “Your men...?”

“Oh, Czeslaw, you ask so many questions. You should be overjoyed at our reunion.”

“...are my questions really that hard to answer?”

“Oh man, you sure give me a headache, Czeslaw. Okay okay, we’ll go on with questions. Though now we must switch roles – I have something to ask you.”

He looked so intent that Czes immediately felt uneasy. He had been holding the same posture for a while now, and his tense muscles protested. But he still didn’t move.

“Y-yes?”

“Czeslaw, how’s Fermet doing?”

“.....!”

If the atmosphere wasn’t so tense, Czeslaw’s sudden change would almost have been comical. He had been putting on a brave front all this while, but on hearing this name, his face drained of all colour. Even Ennis grew pale beside him, and she stared fixedly at the centre of their table.

Of course Victor noticed these changes, but he carried on relentlessly. “When we disembarked, you went west with Fermet. But now you seem to be by yourself...”

“S-stop...”

“Well, we seem to have found a truly hard to answer question, haven’t we. I’ll stop asking you personal questions. But keep this in mind if you ever want to start poking into *my* affairs.” He smiled, but Czeslaw was still white and stony.

Ennis really wanted to say something to snap Czeslaw out of it, but every time she looked at Victor, words died on her tongue. His face – it had been securely lodged in the mind of the alchemist she had devoured. They weren’t just acquaintances, but close friends. In other words, Ennis felt an intense guilt for having eaten such a close partner of the man before her.

Did he come here to kill her? To avenge his friend. Or maybe to take his friend’s memories.

Like Czeslaw, Ennis was stiff and silent. But their silence was cut through by the voice of a young man, surprised, joyful, but also with a hint of reservation.

“Victor – What’s going on? How come you're here?”

A man of 25 or 26 appeared. Although he was wearing glasses like Victor, he exuded a completely different aura. He was tall, with long, smiling eyes, and looked like a warm college professor.



And as for Victor, who everyone thought was beastly already, he warmed somewhat at this voice, and raised his right hand nonchalantly, as if out of habit.

“Ahoy, Maiza. You look like you’re living well. It’s great seeing you again. Sometimes I feel like a stranger when I meet someone I haven’t seen in a while, and so I feel even more a stranger than when we first met. I don’t know who changed, you or me. I was going to tell Czes the same thing, but he didn’t give me the chance. What do you think?”

“You didn’t turn all your blood into liquor after the Prohibition was repealed, did you? Even if you want to lose yourself, it has to stop somewhere...for me, at least.”

“Hey...it seems like I’m not welcome. Did I do something wrong?”

“What do you take this place to be?” Maiza sounded angry, and then sighed as if it should be obvious. “You, a federal agent, come up to an establishment of the Camorra...what could you possibly want?” As he said this, Maiza strode into the shop. All those present were members of the Martillo family and their relationship to officers of the law was already like fire and water, and especially since Isaac and Firo were both taken away, they regarded such men with even greater hostility.

“I know you object to us, Maiza, but that’s really your fault. You keep running these illegal businesses secretly. Don’t you think so?”

Victor was stubborn, and Maiza seemed to relent a little. “Are you here to start a fight? Or do you actually have some urgent matter?”

“Calm down. It’s not really urgent – well, that would depend on how Huey moves.”

“Huey?”

Another immortal to pop out – like Maiza, Czes, and Victor, Huey was one of the alchemists on the *Advenna*.

Maiza looked at Victor in astonishment, and decided to be direct. “Huey – you arrested him, didn’t you?”

“He was really hard to bring to heel. He had tons of subordinates under his command, and they were hard to deal with too. In comparison, even the Flying Pussyfoot incident seems like nothing.”

The Flying Pussyfoot incident. Maiza had heard about it, about how a bunch of terrorists had hijacked the train. He only knew about it because a friend was on board – it had never been reported in the press. Perhaps it had been officially hushed up. It wasn’t mentioned in the news at all, and the families who lost someone in the incident just held private funerals. This sort of cover-up made people like Maiza suspicious. It was hard to hide even daily occurrences, much more a huge railway hijacking involving deaths and injuries. To silence everyone was nearly impossible, and it was a strange approach to deal with the whole incident anyway.

“It couldn’t have been you who barred anyone from reporting this incident, could it?”

“Hey, Maiza, spare me, okay? I don’t have that much power.” Victor humbled himself and then appeared uninterested. “Let’s not discuss this now. I can only say that it’s like someone doesn’t want the existence of immortals to be publicly known.” He continued as if to himself. “And that someone probably outranks me...even though we’re all working towards the same goal, they’re always trying to work against us...a bunch of idiots...”

“All right, so what about Huey?”

“Hmm? Ah, sorry, sorry. As for that, I think Huey managed to send out some information from prison, though as to how he managed it, we have no idea.”

Maiza pursued this matter, and so Victor had to explain. But what he said next shook everyone.

“Oh right. Your little brother, he’s *our* watchdog now.”

CLATTER CLATTER.

In an instant, every man present shoved back their chairs and stood up. The hubbub in the room was even louder than when everyone realized that Victor was from the FBI.

Maiza’s thin eyes became stern, and he glared at his erstwhile friend coldly. “What did you do to Firo? Your answer will determine whether we treat you as an enemy.”

Faced with this, Victor only rolled his eyes exasperatedly and held up both his hands. “Wait wait wait. Wait, Maiza. I really do hate you thieves. But it’d be more trouble for me if we came to blows. I’m here because I want to avoid this kind of misunderstanding...treat me as your enemy...that’s too much.” Victor sighed and rose slowly from his chair. “And he didn’t spill about any of you. So it’s not like he betrayed you and went over to us.”

And then Victor looked at Ennis, his eyes unreadable, but seemed to express his complicated feelings about her. “Right, Miss Ennis is here, correct? I guess she’s the reason that he was willing to walk through fire.”

“Hm...?” Ennis started as she heard her name, and looked at Victor, baffled.

The expression Victor showed was complicated, neither a sneer nor a smile. His voice was deadpan as he related what happened to Firo, and did not hesitate or pause at Ennis’s pale face. As if he was just chatting to Ennis about minor complaints in his life.

“Victor...”

“Don’t look at me like that, Maiza. It looks like Miss Ennis has something to say, and my time is tight, too, so I should go.” Victor polished off his tale, rubbed his hands, and got up to leave.

Maiza’s tight voice followed him. “So, in the end, Huey didn’t say what he was planning? Everything’s an ‘experiment’ to him anyway, and now that Elmer isn’t around, it’s even more... Don’t you know anything at all?”

“I wish I did.” Victor said, a little vaguely, and dusted off his clothes. “Well, according to our investigations, the creep Huey is planning to play some games in New York. Listen well: if he’s really up to no good, don’t go try to fight fire with fire. It won’t do you any good, and it won’t do your organization any good either.” He sounded a bit annoyed, and stalked towards the door.

“...I guess delivering this warning is the real objective of your visit today.”

Victor wasn’t frazzled by this, but instead showed the same self-satisfied expression he wore when he arrived, though now he looked a bit nostalgic. “Maiza, I still regard you as my friend. I advise you not to do anything to jeopardize that. And by the way...I really advise you to wash your hands of this kind of...business. Then we can still go have a drink together sometime.”

He didn't look at Maiza as he said this, and then raised his voice so the whole room could hear, as if to make them forget the rather sentimental words he had just spoken. "Listen up, Maiza! Until now, I've treated you as a friend. Though whether it's the Mafia, or the Camorra, or the 'Ndrangheta, I loathe all of them. They can die for all I care – let them die. Over and over again. Until they regret that they were ever born. If you surround yourself with shit then you are the shit of society. Remember that!"

As if he couldn't stop his outburst in any other way, he ran towards the door.

At that moment, the figure of an older man appeared at the entrance.

"Oh, I apologize." The old man turned in the doorway to let Victor pass. Victor didn't even stop; he just grunted and kept on going. But then he felt a bizarre feeling at his feet.

What...? Was there a chair blocking his way?

Victor looked at his feet. Where was the floor?

As he was thinking this, he felt the wind being knocked out of him. It was like his lungs were burning. And then the floor appeared, right under his nose. With this, Victor had to accept that he had indeed tumbled to the ground.

How did...? He must have tripped on something. But he didn't feel like he tripped.

And then a wrinkled old hand stretched out towards him. It must belong to the old man he squeezed by just now.

"Young man, are you all right?"

Victor looked up and saw an elderly Japanese man, Kanshichiro Yagmal.

"It was you just now, wasn't it, old man?"

Victor had heard a lot about a certain Asian man here, and here he was.

Victor tried to brush off Kanshichiro's helping hand and to get up by himself, but he found that the old man had grabbed a hold of his wrist. Victor felt as if his wrist was being crushed – by such a wrinkled old hand.

Just then, Victor also felt as if he was floating. Kanshichiro's helping hand, added to his own effort to rise, yanked him from the floor and dumped him onto a seat in front of the bar. Somehow Victor's head also landed on the bar. Crack. Something close by broke.

"Be careful."

He turned his head to see shards of a broken bottle, and that another man was cleaning up the mess. "Well, young man, if you fell on a pile of broken glass, you'd be dead for sure, be you a cop, a G-man, or even the president."

Victor felt keen eyes upon him and was very conscious that he had just been humiliated. This was their response to his earlier warnings. He was beaten and he knew it. And he couldn't do anything about it, either. Victor felt galled for a moment, and then tried his best to smooth over his expression.

“Are you threatening me? For someone like me, it’s...”

Kanshichiro leaned over to speak into Victor’s ear. “Well, in addition to being cut by broken glass, my right hand could just slip and land on your head...”

“...!?”

“In the year 1711, that’s what old Szilard did. On the Advenna Avis.”

Who was he...?

Victor’s nervous look swept over him, but couldn’t place him as any of the passengers on the ship. But Maiza wouldn’t blab about what happened to just anyone, either.

Who was he?

The old man smiled at Victor’s confusion, and took the broken glass shards in his hand and squeezed. When he opened his hand, he held a perfect, unbroken bottle. As if the bottle had magically reformed itself.

“...!?”

“Now how about that? To have a mystery pop up when you think you’ve got it all under your control? Alarming, isn’t it?”

“.....”

Victor looked over at Maiza, but Maiza was standing at a distance, and didn’t make any responses to what the old man was saying.

“A magician? ...No. Who are you anyway? It looks like I have to open another case.”

Victor gritted his teeth at his disgrace and stood, putting the bar behind him. “Take heed, all of you...even if you threaten me, I won’t back down.”

He turned to go, and all of the Camorra members looked daggers at his retreating figure. The enmity was palpable and Victor felt it, but he didn’t pause. Because he couldn’t be killed, much less by mere feelings of dislike. So he shouldered their dislike and walked on.

Maiza glanced at the door that Victor just left through. “Yagmal, Ronny, I think your threats went a bit far.”

“Really? If I really wanted to threaten him, his shoulder would be dislocated.” Yagmal was grinning. Ronny, on the other hand, looked coldly at the broken bottle.

“Ronny, what is it?”

“Well, it’s like he doesn’t remember me at all...”

“Do you still expect they’ll remember you?”

At Maiza’s surprised words, Ronny seemed a little crestfallen “No matter. Maiza, I’ve decided.” Ronny muttered to himself. “Next time someone forgets me, I’d have to...leave a stronger impression.”



Victor left the Alveare and climbed into his car. Bill, who was in the driver's seat, turned to him.  
“Ah...so how did that go?”

“Hm...! I thought I was going to be killed for a moment...Maiza, that...this is the first time he looked at me with so much loathing. All those petty mobsters too. Damn it...things actually came to this...Maiza actually managed to sink so low!”

“Um...what are you talking about? C'mon, tell me...”

For some reason, Bill's lax tone annoyed Victor even more. But Bill was oblivious to this, and rambled on. “Hm, didn't you say something like, “I need to rein them in, I want to convince him not to take Huey's bait' or something? What exactly were you doing? You're shaking in your shoes.”

“Whatever, Inspector Sullivan. Whatever you say.”

Bill still pursued an answer even though Victor looked slightly feverish by now. “Hm. I wonder if it's because you've been acting like a jerk.”

“.....”

Victor didn't answer. He knew that he had failed in using his status and position to convince anyone, and so only grimaced and closed his eyes.

But then he suddenly opened them and sat up.

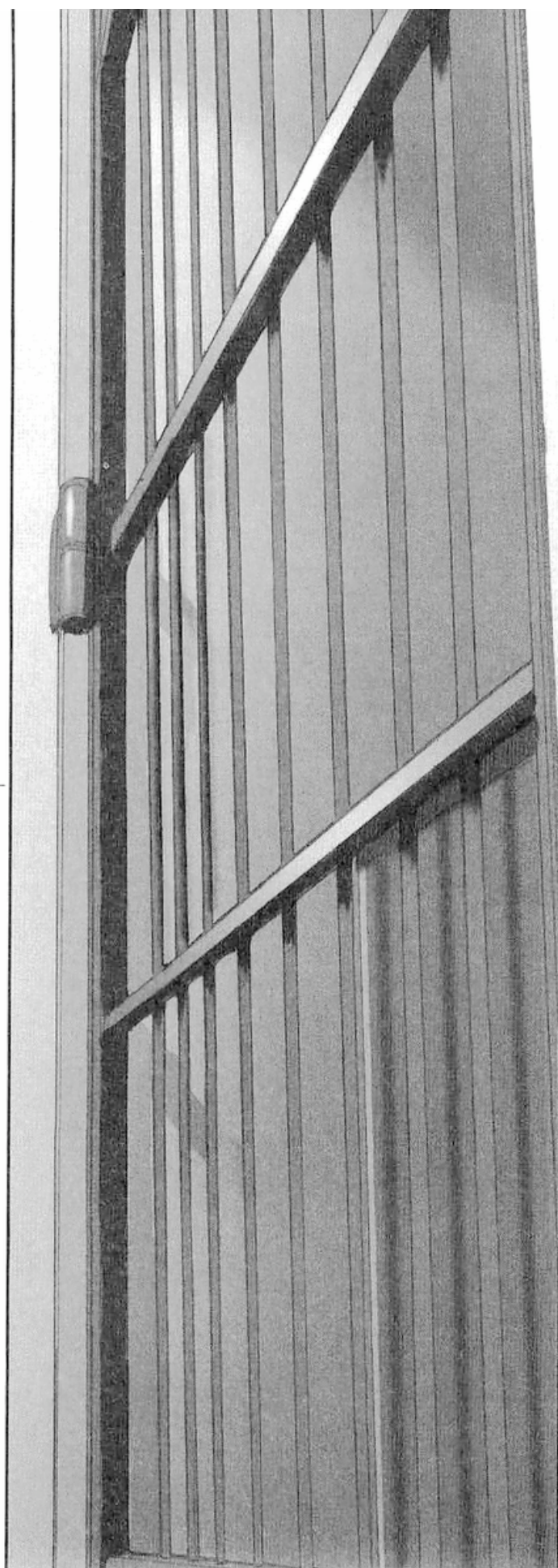
“Damn. I forgot to tell him something.”

“What? What did you forget?”

“I mean the whole business about this other immortal, Isaac...because I didn't expect any of this to happen at all.”

第二章表

サイコの晩餐を味わおう



## Chapter 2 - Part 1 : Let's Eat Our Last Supper Together

Alcatraz dock, San Francisco

“C'mon, off.”

Firo opened his eyes when he heard the guard's cold voice.

The swaying boat had just stopped, and so Firo knew that they had arrived.

The naked lightbulb on the boat made everything appear sharp and clear, and Firo took another opportunity to scan his surroundings. Other than himself, there were three other people being delivered to Alcatraz.

And as for their guards – they became even more stiff and proper after they got off the boat, so there was no chance Firo could ask them anything about the other prisoners. But he could see that each prisoner looked very unique.

There was an Asian man with dragons tattooed on his hands. Although he was wearing a long-sleeved shirt, Firo could imagine from the dragon heads on the back of his hands and the tail on his exposed neck that the dragon was tattooed on his whole body. He looked quite young, perhaps twenty-five or twenty-six.

Another was a very tall and robust African American. From looking at his hair and the structure of his face, Firo thought that he would be about forty. He looked peaceful, but his scars betrayed his true nature. From experience, Firo knew that those scars couldn't come from workplace accidents or from tortures inflicted by the KKK, but rather from many fights and battles.

The last one was a Caucasian man, who was bent over at the moment. He was sighing and seemed terrified of everything. All through the boat ride, he kept muttering to himself, and every time he started acting jittery the guards would tell him to shut up. He would be about thirty, but because he looked so worn out he looked much older, and could even pass for a fifty year old man.

Firo looked through them all and sighed. Such weirdos, and he had to live among them. Well, the infamous Alcatraz wouldn't distinguish between them.

And so, with these three men, Firo stepped off the boat in the setting sun.

The first thing he saw was a looming watch tower. It wasn't as tall as it seemed, but it seemed tall because there weren't any other tall buildings around. It was effective, too; it was ominous and made the prisoners feel like they were constantly under watch.

Such a huge place...

Firo looked around him. There were many large unpolished rocks jagging out of the island, and from far away, the island looked like it was very big. But when he stood there, the rocks seemed to close on the island's interior, and it seemed like a very tight spot indeed.

He turned to look across the bay at San Francisco. The buildings looked close enough to touch, as if it was smaller model of San Francisco before his eyes. But the ocean emphasized its actual distance, and from the relative isolation of the island, it looked like another world.

“Hurry up.”

The four prisoners-to-be ploughed on.

The actual prison was on top of the highest rocks, but from Firo's calculations, the highest point on the island was no more than 50 metres above sea level. The island was long and more than 500 metres, but its width was probably less than 200 metres wide.

How could he describe it? He wouldn't even be surprised if shady characters like Moriarty or Lupin had hideouts there or something.

He should have known about this. If he had regularly read newspapers or geographical magazines and the like, he would have known more about this island. Firo regretted that he didn't spend more time making himself more cultured.

His steps took him forwards, and an orderly cluster of white buildings appeared before his eyes. He supposed that was the actual prison. Around the buildings, though, were other buildings as well. On the whole, the place looked like a military camp. The docks and the boat were probably quite old, sporting rust and the odd piece of trash, but Firo could see that the prison buildings were newly built. They even extruded a strange, awful beauty.

Well, under such circumstances, it might really be impossible to break out. The place did start out as a fortification, and then there were those watch towers. It would also withstand any attacks from the outside. The icy waters around the island would drown anyone who made it there, if the rifle-toting guards didn't finish them first. It might no longer be a military fortification, but the sense of military discipline was still there. It really was a perfect prison.

Firo started to break into a sweat as the bleakness of the island unfolded. By contrast, the blue sea, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the bustling metropolis on either side of the water – all of this seemed more beautiful than they had been a moment ago. And so far away.

They were climbing a series of steep steps going up the hillside. For the prisoners, who were wearing handcuffs, it was a hard and perilous climb. By the time Firo reached the top, his sweat had become cold in the breeze and he felt drained. And then the full force of the prison greeted him.

The guards accompanying them and the wardens at the gate exchanged countersigns. From the depths of the prison came the shrill ringing of a bell, and the two stone gates slowly rumbled open. Right inside the gates were some bars, and behind the bars was what looked like an office, which was protected again by a pane of glass. The wardens in the office looked them over.

The prisoners could only look back, and then they were hustled through the gate.

"You're this way," a warden said, and yanked Firo aside. They went down a different way than the other prisoners. The other prisoners looked at Firo in surprise, but the remaining officers steered them in the opposite direction, and they all disappeared around a corner.

"Why am I..."

"You don't have permission to ask questions," the warden said simply.

Firo studied him. He had thought it was the same person who had spoken to him before the boat left, an underling of Huey Laforet, but he saw now that it was a different man. Firo felt a little more optimistic.

They walked deeper into the prison. Ahead, there was someone waiting in a small room. There was only a table and a couple of chairs, like it was a makeshift office. The man looked at Firo and then



glanced at his colleague in greeting. The warden who took Firo there just nodded slightly, said “Ciao,” and immediately disappeared out the door.

Now that he was alone with this man, Firo studied him too.

He was dressed differently from the wardens, in a crisp suit. He was middle-aged, his hair short, and had a very serious expression. In the same steady manner, he walked towards Firo.

Was he the Chief Warden?

As he was wondering this, the other man introduced himself. “Welcome, Mr. Firo Prochainezo. I am the Special Warden here, Missouri. On paper, I’m the assistant to the vice-director, but the arrangement here is slightly different from other institutions. It is a certain individual’s wish that you are not to be under the care of Warden Johnston, but rather under me and other select officers.”

“Oh, in other words, you’re a friend of Victor’s, right?” Since he was in this man’s territory, Firo decided that he should at least be polite.

Missouri just nodded, and cut straight to the chase. “Victor told me about your case. Personally, I object to using you, someone who’s not a federal agent, and an immortal no less, from the very beginning.”

“Actually, I’d rather you beat me up and spare me this operation.”

“Hmm. We tried beating him up too, and we prodded him and kicked him, but he’s very stubborn. We even wanted to hold his family hostage, but unfortunately he has none.”

So too bad. A joke, but also true.

Firo felt a little less apprehensive now, and decided to drop his enmity for a bit and listen to what Missouri had to say.

“So then...regarding Huey Laforet...has Victor introduced the matter to you?”

“A bit, yeah.”

“Hmm...well, he's in control of a large number of different organizations. From Victor's spy network, it seems that they are preparing for some kind of large-scaled operation in New York.”

“New York?”

“Ah, therefore, as an immortal yourself – and as Huey has no knowledge of your identity – you actually are our best candidate. That’s Victor’s reason for using you.”

This made Firo shudder a little. In the Mist Wall bombing, he had already tangled with Huey’s protégés. Considering how Mist Wall had been, there was no telling when they would act this time. And Ennis had also provided some details on them too.

Firo thought of a particular one, a strange creature with fangs, and unconsciously started grinding his back teeth. It’s not like he could deliver this information at once to anyone in New York. Victor probably won’t let anyone know either. Firo started to feel the pressure of his burden, yet was also aware his powers were limited. It made him uneasy.

He could only clench his fists, which really solved nothing, since he was all the way over here now in prison. The only thing he could do was to disrupt Huey's movements from within.

".....sorry if I'm gonna be direct now, but..."

"Mmm hm."

"Well, if I want to help my friends in New York, the only thing I can really do is devour Huey Laforet...is that your plan? Victor would be suspicious, but I'm still a hidden card, so I guess I can 'eat' him."

There was a moment of silence. Missouri seemed to be considering, and then shook his head.

".....No, Victor isn't such a monster as to want that."

"So then what?"

"Hm...well, that's not my wish. I will communicate detailed instructions to you via the wardens. Before you receive instructions, you should try to act the same as other prisoners and blend in. Particularly, do not do anything that might reveal your identity as an immortal."

Firo smiled at Missouri's cautionary words. "Well...I dunno, I think I might've already been made."

"...how do you mean?"

"I've been found out. The fact I got here, and the fact I'm an immortal." And he told Missouri what happened before he boarded the boat. Again he silently cursed his fate.

"Is that so..." Missouri shook his head wearily.

"But you know, I was thinking that I'd seen him somewhere else before, that guy."

"Ah...well, how Huey does these things is really quite unfathomable."

Firo deduced from Missouri's words that Huey had managed to gather intelligence on the outside and could also command his people on the outside.

"If what you say is true, then we've been infiltrated already, and moreover, what you've revealed is probably only a fraction of Huey's larger plans. But we don't have any evidence, so questioning the wardens won't help, and it's not like the one you mentioned can be punished for neglecting any of his duties. I suppose we can ask the Chief Warden to find him another position somewhere else, but who's to say there aren't more of them in here?"

"Wow, your devotion to your job is admirable."

"Please, insulting us will do no good. But anyway, even though Huey has many tricks up his sleeve to co-opt our employees, they're not the best people to use as his spies, and what he can find out would be limited."

"That's true."

Very few people knew that Firo was an immortal. The Daily Days publisher was another story, though. He'd never thought that this prison could have any connection with the distant newspaper publisher in New York.

Perhaps this Missouri in front of him was one of Huey's men.

Firo had thought of this, but it was still a guess. If it was true, perhaps Missouri would show all his cards eventually. But in the end, he could only do as they say. All he had been entrusted up till now would somehow contribute to Huey's downfall.

This kind of work wouldn't bring him any benefits, and Firo could only hope it didn't cause him too much trouble. He couldn't suppress another sigh.

Missouri looked at Firo with sympathy, and then asked something strange.

"Lastly, I'd like to ask..."

"Yep?"

"What would be your evaluation of the three convicts who arrived with you?"

"..."

He must mean the Asian, and African American, and the Caucasian. Firo thought it was strange that Missouri would ask him this, as no matter how much he tried to remember, he could only conclude that he and the other prisoners had simply rubbed shoulders as they passed. He didn't even speak to them. So Firo turned the question on Missouri instead.

"Why'd you ask me that?"

"Well, originally you were the only inmate we were supposed to receive today."

"?"

"However, recently our internal communication has been rather disorderly, so the inmates who were supposed to be transferred next week arrived today, along with you."

This was a strange thing to happen, but Firo didn't attribute too much significance to it. He had thought that he'd be among the other inmates, living in the same way as they did, but it turned out not to be.

"Did you notice anyone that stood out among the three of them?"

"Well, if you have to ask...the White guy, he kept on muttering to himself all the way here."

"Really...well, never mind then. They'd be your neighbours, I suppose, and you can all make friends. But I warn you, private chatting is not permitted here."

So what was he supposed to do, use sign language to make friends?

Firo bit back this retort, and was silently led to another room for a health check.

For a young Camorra capo such as himself to be stripped naked as the day he was born and paraded before the doctor and the wardens was a great shame. The doctor was surprisingly brisk as he flipped Firo's eyelids, looked into his ears, and also did a rectal examination. It was a comprehensive check-up, but it only took a very short time.

Under normal circumstances, if Firo was having a rectal exam done on him before other people, he'd flush with embarrassment and vow he'd take his revenge, but everything proceeded so quickly that thoughts of revenge didn't surface as yet.

Oh, whatever, I guess.

Firo was tired and reached out for his clothes, but the expressionless warden did not give them to him.

"Not yet."

"?"

"The latest fashions have been prepared in your cell, and until you get there, this is the way you'll be."

The neatly uniformed warden lead the completely nude Firo out.

Firo felt as disgusted as if he'd just swallowed an insect. He was pissed, but didn't have anyone to take it out on, other than himself. They turned a corner onto a long hallway.

It was pretty quiet, but Firo could hear rustlings and breaths and other small sounds, and understood that these were the cells.

The walls – no, they were bars.

Along the hallway were cells, and all the cells were full. In such tiny cells, even tiny movements would be irritating.

- --- the second floor...no, the third?

The cells weren't just on parallel hallways, but also hallways that crossed them. The whole organization made Firo think of a honeycomb, but of course arrivals and departures wouldn't be as free as a bee.

And Firo was preoccupied with other things.

Such as – many of the inmates wanted to see what this newbie was like, and looked the naked Firo up and down through the bars. They all only briefly glanced at his face, but many of them ogled at his body.

"Welcome to Firo Prochainezo, our new missie."

Firo heard this and turned to see who said it. He saw a small man with loose flesh, who had horrible, protruding teeth, leering at him.

Firo felt as though he'd seen this man somewhere before. He stepped forward in case he didn't have another chance for a closer look. Before he could, though, one of the expressionless wardens said "Shut up."

It was just two words, but it echoed down the hallway and seemed to crush everyone with an ominous pressure.

"If anyone else creates a disturbance, you can come with me to the Dungeons."

All the inmates froze in silence.

Firo was astounded at such a dramatic change, but he kept following his warden. After he had gone halfway down this floor, he stopped. The warden on guard in the hallways slowly slid open a massive iron door, and Firo was pushed into a single cell.

“A warning.” The door was sliding shut. His warden looked at him with an almost tender expression, and said, “I know everything that man said to you, and I know you’d think you’re being unfairly treated. However, if you intend to cause trouble for him, we won’t hesitate to send you to the Dungeons. You could say that’s our torture chamber.”

“This place really isn’t suitable for acts of revenge.”

“Well, it really is the latest fashions.”

Firo could only mutter sarcastically to himself as he saw the clothes on the bed. It was a plain and somewhat faded set of blue prison uniforms, probably the most worn set in the whole place.

But then he noticed that although all the clothes on the bed were of the same colour, there was a great variety of different clothing types. Two sets of underclothes and shirts. Six pairs of socks. One belt, one hat, and a handkerchief. Amazingly, two pairs of shoes, one pair for working and another for daily wear.

And Firo was glad to see a woolen sweater hanging on a clothing rack. He needn’t be afraid of freezing to death, he thought - he’d momentarily forgotten that he was an immortal. And kept on exploring what was in the room.

The fold-out bed was attached to the wall. In one corner was a toilet without a toilet seat. Beside the toilet was a sink, and water gushed out at the slightest turn of the handle.

Across from the nightstand and against the wall was a folding shelf with two levels. Firo opened the cupboard and was surprised to see all sort of daily amenities. A shaving razor, a metal mug, a sleep mask, a comb, soap, a toothbrush and toothpaste, nail clippers, toilet paper, shoe brush. In another corner was a broom for keeping his cell clean.

On top of the cupboard was a thick volume of prison regulations. Firo flipped through it absently and then continued exploring.

The fact that the small room was chock full of stuff gave Firo an odd feeling. Wasn’t this nice, this hospitality?

This thought vanished in an instant when Firo raised his head to look at the ceiling. It was low and made Firo feel slightly claustrophobic. A single lightbulb shone coldly into his eyes.

And when he looked across at the cell opposite him, he could see its inmate sitting on his toilet, taking care of a call from nature. Firo clucked his tongue and rolled his eyes. If he could so clearly observe his neighbour doing his business, his neighbour could likewise observe him. Firo made a resolution that he really must somehow leave this place.

After the first roll call, Firo found out that to his left and right were the Asian and the African American. Recently there had been a breakout involving three prisoners, or if not a breakout then



they had disappeared in some other way, and Firo thought that the three of them were thus put into the three empty cells. The Caucasian man was probably in a similar cell, farther away.

Firo decided to give up on feeling sorry for himself. At least, compared to the poverty in his youth, he had four sturdy walls around him.

The next issue was food. It was rumoured that prison food tasted awful. Randy and Peccho, who had stayed in jail, said that the food was so bad that they longed even for industrial alcohol mixed with water, and therefore resolved never to go to jail again. Although they hadn't sworn any oaths that they would stop committing crimes, they often said similar things in a joking way, which was how they talked about everything anyway. Firo felt disgruntled remembering this.

As Firo trudged towards his first meal, he wondered what sort of hellish food awaited him.

The dining hall wasn't like hell after all. It had the same cold walls and floor as the cells, but whereas the cells were crowded, the dining hall gave off a feeling of openness.

The inmates took trays in an ordered row, got their food in order, left the row in order, and picked a spot to eat in order. Firo looked around him at all the inmates and felt the feeling of openness vanish.

Although technically the inmates all sat according to where they were in line, small groups still formed and divided from one another. Whites sat with Whites. Blacks with Blacks. The African American sat with his fellows and the Asian man drifted off to the few Asian inmates, as if they had been somehow mysteriously invited. The Caucasians were sitting in a far corner. Firo decided not to bother going all the way there and sat down to eat closer by.

As he began to eat, he mused about what Missouri had said. One of the three other inmates probably really had ulterior motives for coming here today. It had been "the police vs. Huey," but perhaps it wasn't so simple; there were probably other groups involved as well. Otherwise, one of the inmates could have come with the objective of helping Huey break out. Either way, it was hard to imagine anyone in the same position as he was in.

Oh, whatever. In a way, everyone here was his enemy. Perhaps, when he slept, someone could enter his cell and reach for his head. Firo thought of this and flicked on the emergency engine in his mind.

But at this moment –

"Hey!"

What sounded like a slightly off-key tone echoed through the mess hall, and all the inmates turned to look.

"Hey! Firo! It's you, isn't it?"

Firo's stomach lurched. Hey hey hey. Wait a sec.

It was a familiar voice. But it wasn't from Szilard's memories, but directly from the life and memories of Firo Prochainezo.

How? How could he be here?

Firo raised his head slowly, and there was that familiar face, with a huge grin that was totally out of context, his arms waving wildly in Firo's direction.

-- Isaac!

Firo couldn't believe his eyes. He thought he was dreaming. Isaac had been taken away a month before he was, and there hadn't been any news regarding his whereabouts. So he was here the whole time.

--huh?

Although everyone had turned to look at Isaac, when they saw that it was Isaac, everyone seemed to think nothing of it and returned to their food.

---so...why would that be?

The wardens also looked at one another, sighed wearily, and approached Isaac. Isaac was soon surrounded by the sound of police boots. It was a perfect formation.

Firo stared blankly for a moment, before the scene continued to unfold.

"You again?"

"What do you mean, me again?"

A warden grabbed Isaac's waving hand and smoothly locked his legs together.

"Oh, you..."

"You're playing jokes on me again."

"If you think that breaking the prison rules is good fun...well, congratulations, this is the tenth time you're going to the Dungeons. We'll even give you handcuffs as a souvenir."

And then the wardens carried Isaac out as if they were carrying a full-sized statue.

...

Firo was speechless, and his spoon went around his food in confused circles.

Even though Isaac was bound hand and foot, he still struggled. "Hey, guys, c'mon, that was a private matter. An old friend from New York. That was hello, New York style."

"Yeah, yeah. We get it." It seemed that the wardens were very used to Isaac's antics. "We get it, so we're sending you to the Dungeons."

"What a pity this ain't New York."

"You get the Alcatraz style into your thick head, moron."

"Be a good kid and have a nap in the Dungeon, okay? We envy you, y'know."

The wardens ushered Isaac out as if sending a naughty child to his room.

...um...and how do I deal with all this....

Firo listened to Isaac's continuing protests and was wondering whether he should help, and what he could do, exactly, when his thoughts were interrupted by Isaac's response.

"Hm? You envy me? C'mon, there's not much food there, and when I'm locked up I can't even move."

"Wonderful weight loss program. If we lock you up you'd lose weight even faster."

"Well, great, but the thing is, am I really that fat?"

"You're fat in spirit. Now shut up."

...

...um...what the hell...

...never mind.

Firo could only accept that this was his reality now, and sighed. At least Isaac was a familiar face. That brought him a bit of hope.

"Hey you, you're his buddy, ain't..?" A warden asked.

"Guess so." Firo didn't wait for the guard to finish, and gave a half grimace as a smile.

A friend, yes, but unfortunately, he's not such a reliable one.

The incident with Isaac, short as it was, made the atmosphere of the dining hall change very quickly. Firo watched Isaac being hefted out from the corner of his eye, and decided that it was best to eat first. He turned to his food.

...?

He was expecting something along the lines of cold, thin broth, but once again he was wrong. When he was getting his food, he had been otherwise preoccupied, and so he hadn't taken a proper look. Now that he did, he saw that there were red and green vegetables, a thick soup, fried rice that wasn't even the slightest bit burnt. The main course looked like meat patties and steak in barbecue sauce. The warm food was steaming, and there was even a fruit salad.

...wow...

Maybe everything only looked delicious. But it didn't make sense that food that looked good didn't taste good. Firo shovelled out a chunk of meat with this spoon. Of course, it wasn't as good as burgers he could get at restaurants outside, but a pleasant aroma rose and made him very hungry indeed. He tried it and found that it was much better than he had expected.

The soup was also very savoury, and matched up to what he would have made outside. The vegetables were crunchy, and for a moment he forgot that he was actually locked up in jail.

...this is weird. This is...isn't this what we normally eat...?

“Is it good?”

It was another inmate beside him, happily looking at the vigour with which Firo was chewing his vegetables. “I was surprised too. When I first ate here.”

Firo wondered whether he ought to reply. After all, look what happened to Isaac. While he was agonizing over this, the other inmate continued.

“Ah, well, when this prison was first set up, of course if you talked you’d get punished, but that isn’t the case anymore. We’re eating, so they let us chitchat.”

“Oh, ok.”

“The powers that be know it. If you’re too hard on prisoners, that’ll piss them off. We’d riot. I suppose the wardens here could just massacre us, though then how’d they look to the rest of the country? Nah.”

“I see...” Firo tried to speak quietly, and looked around him to see what everyone else was doing. He heard low snatches of conversation from all around.

“We have some freedom, yes, but it’s still as boring as hell. Look at them. They all look despondent. It’s like they are all asking, ‘when are we gonna die?’”

“Yeah, I guess it’s a tragedy...”

“You’re new, right? How did you get in here?”

“? I took the train, and then the ferry from the dock.”

The other inmate nodded, and then smiled cheerfully. “When I first got here, the prison was just set up. Oh, maybe...thirty or forty people brought me here. We took the train for three days and three nights. And I never got off the train, not even once, until we got to the prison.”

“Huh?”

Firo thought, how could this guy have come onto this island without getting off the train? But the other man continued smiling and talking.

“They lifted the entire train compartment and transported it to the island.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. In a country like this, that’s legal...but to tell you the truth, I don’t think it’s a small thing to pull off, either.”

Firo felt somewhat in awe of this man, and also thought that he looked somewhat different from the other prisoners.

“You know, you don’t have the same ‘when am I gonna die’ expression as the others.”

“Hm...? Oh, that’s because I have an objective here.”

Firo understood this to mean that the man wanted to break out. He didn't know anything about the man's background, or how long he had been imprisoned, but he had enormous respect for anyone who could stay here and still stay positive.

The man patted Firo on the shoulder and spoke with some force. "Ah, we'll become good friends, you'll see. If you have any questions, ask me."

"Oh, I'm Firo, and you?"

As Firo introduced himself, he reached out with his left hand for a handshake, but then he saw the other man's left hand and hurriedly pulled his own back.

"Your...your hand..."

"Oh, you mean this." The man pulled out his hand and put it on the table. It made the table shake.

"A prosthetic limb. Not bad, right?"

"Hm...iron....? Hey, have you always had it...?"

"Of course not. It was especially made recently. This limb attaches directly to my bones. If you remove it, I don't know what will happen. If I don't be careful, who knows, I might even die."

At first, Firo thought that he was joking. But then he thought, why would the wardens allow such a prosthetic limb to be waved about in prison? Perhaps they had their reasons. Firo couldn't find an answer and decided not to think about it.

At the same time, the other man smiled and reached out his left hand again.

"Ladd...Ladd Russo. Nice to meet you."

Behind his smile was violence and cruelty. If wolves could smile, this would be it.

Firo's hand touched the cold metal of the prosthetic limb, and didn't know what to think. He did not know how their fates would be intertwined...



とりあえず話をしてみよう

第二章裏



## Chapter 2 - Part 2 : Let's Chat

Millionaire Row, New York

This story started with Carnegie.

It had been 1901. Anyone who saw the area of Fifth Avenue then would only say it was still rustic. But Andrew Carnegie, named the “emperor of steel” for his business in iron and steel, built his mansion there, and it forever changed the future of this street.

Now it was called “Millionaire Row” because after Carnegie, many other successful businesses sprang up. Like magic, acres full of pastoral sunshine were transformed into a metropolis full of tall buildings. And people who could afford to live there had incomes usually around the millions.

For these people who have achieved the American dream, the street also became a symbol of this dream. It was not only the dream literally in concrete form, but also a symbol of hope for those aiming to become rich. Even those who believe that money isn't all powerful couldn't deny the success and power that came with money.

But now, from a corner of Fifth Avenue came a sound that didn't quite fit with its opulent image – the sound of sobbing. One would never think that such a sound would come from this neighbourhood of the rich and powerful. A young man was crying.

“Boo hoo hoo....hooo... ..”

“Stop crying...there's no point. Don't be so sad.”

“Boo hoo.....hic...sor-sorry...boo hoo hoo...sorry ....hic...hooo...Ni-i...Nice...”

An especially rich mansion stood among the others, and in its front hall, a young man was trying to bury his face in a marble column while his tears splashed onto the red carpet.

On his face was a tattoo shaped like a sword. The sword and the tears seemed at odds with one another, but a closer look revealed that there were vestiges of a child in the young man's face, and the timidity in his eyes did indeed fit with the tears.

Beside him stood a woman, but this woman was unlike the usual upper-class ladies around these parts. She was dressed stately enough, perhaps, but a deep scar ran across her face to her right eye. Over her eye was an eyepatch, and on her nose was a pair of glasses. She looked like an intellectual - but then again, she didn't. It was all very contradictory.

There were other people standing around them as well, and no matter how you look at them, they seemed like misplaced street rats. They surrounded the strange scene unfolding in their midst.

“Hn...hn...bu-but...but Nice...Mr. Graham... he...”

“You shouldn't be sad, Jacuzzi. If Jacuzzi cries, Graham won't be at peace over there.”

Upon hearing this, the gang members surrounding them began to argue amongst themselves.

(Hey, what's up...?)

(Huh?)

(C'mon, what the hell happened? Who died?)

(No clue. Jacuzzi was crying his eyes out when I got back.)

(Tch...his cry-baby skills seem to improve every year.)

(Maybe he'll cry himself dry at some point.)

(That won't do. Don't tears come from your brain fluids or something?)

(Shit. That means he might cry his *brains* out.)

(This is so depressing...death...death's so depressing. Jacuzzi, crying, death...oh no...um...who died, exactly?)

(sadnfewr...wednqefno....)

(Dammit, he can't even talk properly. John, why's Jacuzzi crying?)

(Oh, well...you see, weren't they talking about Graham-san? That's Graham Specter.)

(Oh. ...Uh, who's this dude again?)

(Huh? You don't know? He's in the same line of work as us, and a boss. We depended on him a lot when we came to New York. He's done a lot for Jacuzzi, and Jacuzzi thinks of him as his benefactor.)

(Wow, there's such a guy...didn't know.)

(You know we have those warehouses on the piers, right? Graham Specter lets us use them. He's letting us use them freely.)

(Oh ok. But weren't they saying that he's dead or something?)

(Hm...)

(Oi, if so, then Nice would have to take over for a while.)

(For a while? But he's dead right? Didn't Nice say something about "in peace over there"?)

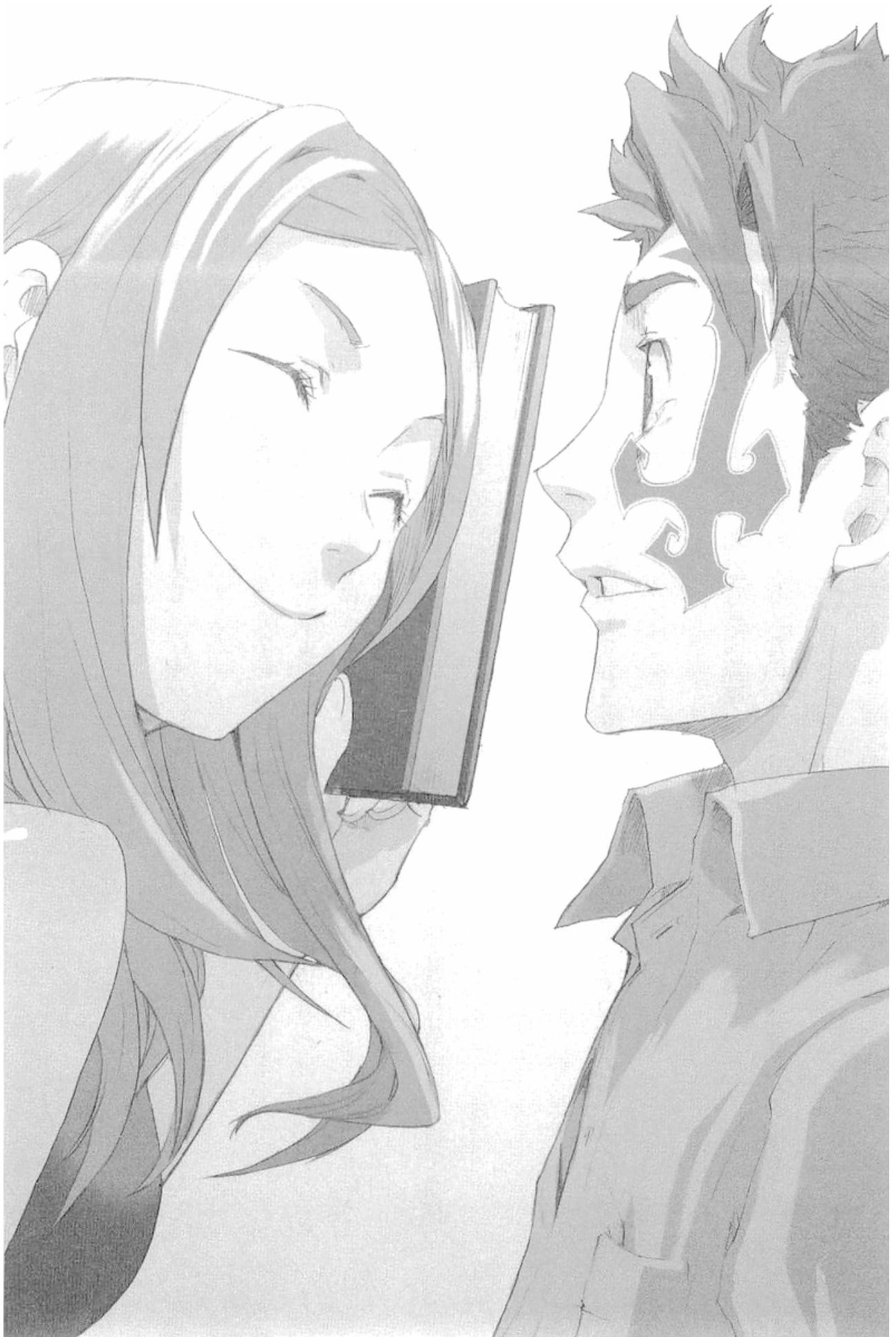
(Oh, the "other there" isn't the afterlife if you were thinking along those lines. It's Chicago.)

(Chicago?)

When John said the name of this city, all of gang members startled, and then all jumped into the conversation. They all came from Chicago, and only came to New York to avoid entanglements with other local gangs.

(What? Chicago?) (As in the same Chicago?) (Then that's our hometown!) (Man, I miss Chicago...) (Haven't the guns cooled down yet?) (Are the Russos still alive?) (I wonder when we'd be able to go back.) (But it's nice here too, eh? We normally don't get to live in a mansion.) (Yeah, super.) (Haha.)





The two central figures completely ignored this idle chatter.

“B-but...but Nice...Us and Mr. Graham...our turf’s been g-getting smaller ever since we came here...D-do they want to grab from the big organizations? That’s why...in trouble...what am I gonna do...”

“Well, that’s why they’ve escaped to Chicago. You needn’t worry.”

But Jacuzzi kept on crying and couldn’t see the brighter side of things. “But...but...Graham...we can’t know whether he found his friends in Chicago or not...hooo...he might already be dead! I have to become stronger... I can’t stop him from going, and I can’t go back to Chicago to help him either...ahhhh ...what to do...”

As usual, Nice stood by and tried to get him to stop crying. All those around knew what a trial that would be –

*Rap-rap-rap --*

Jacuzzi felt something hit him lightly on the head, and turned his wide and tear-filled eyes to see who it was. He saw a girl with golden hair, who was pouting and holding a thick book.

“This won’t do, Jacuzzi! If you keep crying, you’ll wash away that tattoo!”

“Mi-Miria...” Jacuzzi unconsciously touched his face. “Is it s-still there? Oh, good...” Jacuzzi gave a small sigh of relief.

Seeing that he finally started to calm down, Miria spoke up. “See, you look muuuuch better when you’re not crying.” Her good-natured smile was infectious, and Jacuzzi stopped crying. Miria was a little older than Jacuzzi, but when his gang saw her innocent expression, they often wondered who was older, really.

Jacuzzi seemed to realize something else as he looked at Miria’s smile. “That’s right...Miria must feel awful too, and here I am crying...”

At this, all the delinquents swivelled their heads to glare at Jacuzzi. If there can be meaning in a look, this look would have meant, “You numbskull!”

Jacuzzi looked blank for a moment, but then realized what he just said, and turned to Miria in a panic. “Um...Uh...Miria...I....”

Miria had lowered her head and so Jacuzzi couldn’t see her expression. What would have been a cheerful atmosphere vanished with Jacuzzi’s blunder, and Miria just whispered a name.

“Isaac...”

It was just a whisper, and of course, no one answered. Miria gave a deep sigh. “Ah....”

---and started crying.

None of the delinquents knew what to do. They could just watch the situation worsen. They were already imagining what Miria would look like – eyes filled with tears, her face mottled from crying. But Miria steadied herself on a nearby chair, and bit down on her lip to still the sob rising from her chest.



“...I *won't* cry.”

“Miria...”

“Oh, I’m okay. Don’t worry. If I start I won’t stop you know!”

When she lifted her head, there was the usual bright smile on her face. But compared with the usual nonsense sprouting from her lips, this incident revealed exactly how upset she really felt.

“Isaac once said he liked to see me smile. I also like to see Isaac smile! So no matter what, I won’t cry!” Miria made this declaration and went out the room, leaving Jacuzzi and the others looking at one another in amazement.

“Won’t cry? Hell, when she got here she cried for three days.”

“Yeah, and Jacuzzi also cried with her for three days...what a pain in the---”

“Quiet!” Nice jumped in to stop the other delinquents from mouthing off.

They immediately tried to assume serious expressions of concern. “Hey, don’t be angry, Nice. We’re just joking around.”

Jacuzzi didn’t even notice them. His face had fallen again.

“Oh no...it’s all my fault...if only I – I didn’t...s-say...”

“C’mon, Jacuzzi, stop crying. If you keep going like this, you really won’t be able to stop.”

“Hn...s-sorry...”

John swept his gaze appraisingly over the rest of the delinquents, and then nudged the Asian man beside him. “Say, Huang, the one who got Miria to stop crying was Chane, right?”

“Ahh, yes you’re right, I was surprised too. Aiya, I never saw such a thing before either.”

“Oh well. But Chane, where’s Chane? I didn’t see her.”

“Ah, Chane, she went out today.”

Where to? John was just going to ask, but then immediately thought of the answer, and didn’t ask. Huang, however, seemed to guess what he was thinking, and grinned. “Ah yes, a date. With Felix Walken.”

New York – Madison Square Garden

In this park, which neighboured Fifth Avenue, a girl was sitting in deep thought.

This park, a green space, seemed to have dropped out of the sky to sit among the Empire State Building and other skyscrapers. It was winter, and the bare trees competed with the bustle around them. The park felt a little out of place, and it was a lot smaller than Central Park, but it was an oasis. Passers-by would often find that it offered them a rare spite from the outside world, and gladly enveloped themselves in this little square of imagination.

The snow that fell a few days earlier hadn't yet melted, and children played in the park, laughing and chasing one another and throwing snowballs. In all this activity, Chane Laforet sat very still, sunk in her own little world.

She was thinking about what happened a month ago, when a girl arrived, a friend of Jacuzzi's. The girl was crying non-stop at that time.

Chane actually didn't know a lot about this Miria. All she knew was that Miria would sometimes visit Jacuzzi to play cards, or ask for help to resolve some difficulty, and her relationship with Jacuzzi seemed to be built on helping each other. In addition, she seems to have saved Jacuzzi's life or something, so Chane found her tolerable.

Before, Miria would show up with a man who always had a very light-hearted expression on his face. But this time she arrived alone, and so Chane felt that something wasn't right. Although she didn't know them that well, she could see they stuck to each other like white on rice.

Maybe they had a fight? If so, it was none of her business. But as she pondered about how to help..

After a few days, Chane heard about what happened, and went to discuss it with Jacuzzi.

"Isaac...I heard he was taken by the police, and no one's heard anything from him since..."

Jacuzzi had been extremely surprised, and Chane also pricked up her ears at this and listened carefully. Afterwards, she thought about it for a while, and then went to find Miria.

"Oh, Chane..." Miria's eyes were red and puffy, and it looked like she was just crying.

*Are you well?* Chane wrote on a piece of paper.

"Yeah...sorry." Miria looked at the paper that Chane was holding and smiled a little. "Sorry for coming so abruptly, but the apartment I'm living in, it's not really safe anymore, so I gotta find another place to be...sorry for the trouble."

Chane shook her head slowly at Miria's sincere apology. She didn't think it was a simple problem, but she didn't think it was as complicated as Jacuzzi thought it was. The problem here was that every time Jacuzzi saw Miria crying, he would start crying himself, and it would take every ounce of Nice's energy to get him to stop crying. But of course, that was their problem – it didn't really have much to do with Miria.

Seeing that Miria had calmed down a bit, Chane again took the paper and wrote on.

*Someone important to me was also arrested.*

"Oh...really? Your boyfriend?"

*My father.*

Although it was the first time she was using a pen and a paper to communicate with someone, Miria seemed to accept it readily and responded to Chane's words easily. Miria's expression was downcast and somewhat closed, but was because of the predicament she was in; because she accepted Chane, who was so out of the ordinary, Chane began to like Miria a little.

"...um...how long has he been...?"

*About four years.*

“Really...but Chane isn’t upset?”

To say that she wasn’t upset would be a lie, but in his absence, she only felt furious. Her fury and her protectiveness over her father had made her do all sort of extraordinary things, like hijacking the train with her father’s other subordinates.

She only felt lonely and sad later – perhaps it was after she met Jacuzzi and his friends. It was Jacuzzi and his friends that made her anger fade, and her sadness, long under control, welled up. But Jacuzzi also made her feel less lonely, which is why she didn’t cry her pillow wet like Miria was doing. Maybe if she lost her father forever, and Jacuzzi and everyone else she cared about also vanished. That would be unimaginable.

So Chane felt complicated about all of this, and didn’t know how to answer Miria’s question. She wrote an answer that wasn’t really an answer: *The person important to me will not come back just because I feel sad.*

“Really...Chane, you’re so strong!”

Chane didn’t know whether she should nod in agreement. Was she strong? She had never thought that she was strong. And conversely, did Miria’s freely flowing tears mean that she wasn’t strong?

Miria smiled through her tears at Chane’s thoughtful expression. “Chane, you wait. He’ll come back.”

To this, Chane nodded.

“So, this means we’re friends.”

This was so simple and innocent that Chane felt herself blush slightly. She was always aware of such changes in herself, but she brushed it aside. She also had something more to say to Miria. After a moment’s thought, she took up the paper again.

*If you don’t mind, would you please tell me what the person important to you is like?*

“Sure!”

And so Chane spent the night chatting with Miria, and she found that she was able to smile a little, too.

The next day, Miria appeared before Jacuzzi and his gang, her eyes dry and a brilliant smile on her face. Even though sometimes her eyes might get a little teary from thinking about Isaac, on the whole she calmed down considerably. Everyone else let out a sigh of relief.

But Chane alone was still thinking, thinking.

It was true that Miria really couldn’t do much right now but wait. From what Miria told her, it didn’t sound like Isaac’s crimes were that serious, and some criminals like Isaac would be released almost immediately.

Which was different from her father.

Although he was arrested on the charges of being a terrorist and a threat to national security, it wasn't true. The stories in the news that reported Huey's background and crimes were fabricated.

Her father couldn't possibly create such a terrorist identity. It must have been others who created false evidence in his name. The people who ordered his arrest were probably targeting him because he was an immortal.

Maybe he won't be let out for a long time. Maybe he will be finished off by another immortal. Or maybe those people from last year's Mist Wall incident...those self-proclaimed followers of her father...

If she were to believe them, then her father was still alive, and still giving orders to his people on the outside. This news would make her feel more assured, except she wasn't sure what her father was trying to do in prison, what "experiments" he was trying to conduct.

Chane raised her head to look at the trees around Central Park, thinking.

After she encountered Jacuzzi and his friends, the world opened before her in a way it never had before. What would she do now?

This time, perhaps I ought to discuss this with everyone first. With Miria, and Jacuzzi. And another, the person she was waiting for, the first one to open her world –

It would be another thirty minutes until they would meet.

Chane just sat alone on a park bench, staring into space. But then, a small bird flew into her sight. It was originally gathered with other birds at the entrance to the park. Did it come to her to herald his arrival?

She didn't believe that, of course, but her heart beat faster, and she couldn't help glancing at the entrance. And when she saw who was standing there, her body tensed.

The man before her eyes was wearing a black outfit, and it was obvious that he was different from the usual park visitor. He wore a black eyepatch, on which was embroidered a pattern. He carried two long canes, one in each hand, and sauntered towards Chane.

.....?

Chane didn't know any men who wore such an eyepatch, yet, she felt that he was somewhat familiar.

An old wound on her right shoulder started to hurt, and her brain kept on sending her furious alarm signals to make her recall this person. Nothing came up. However, he seemed threatening, and she couldn't just ignore him.

She decided to listen to her instincts, and calmly moved her hands towards the knife at her waist.

They were only five metres apart. If he drew a gun at her now, she could still block the bullet.

Chane stared hard at the man, watching his every move – and he suddenly stopped. The corners of his lips turned up in an unpleasant way, not a smile but a leer. His voice was full of mockery.

"Ah, you're reaching for your knife, eh?"

---Tch!

“Ahahahahahahahahaha!”

With this unpleasant peal of laughter, Chane finally remembered who it was.

But how...! He should have died already....

The man stroked his short goatee and started rambling at her with extremely foul language. “Hey, what’s up? You were once a bitch hound, but now you’re just sitting in a park? What the fuck?”

--Spike!

The cult that followed Huey Laforet was called “Lemures.” Once, Chane was also a part of the Lemures, and Spike had been one deadly member.

She didn’t know whether it was his real name, and didn’t know anything about his background. However, his function as the best sharp-shooter in the group attested to his abilities. Many objective that the group achieved were because of his deadly bullets.

During the hijacking of the Flying Pussyfoot, she and the Lemures had been working together. However, they betrayed her, and Spike had shot her in the shoulder.

“Hell, why is Huey Laforet’s princess lookin’ at me like that? Don’t tell me you have a crush on me. Don’t get your hopes up, missy. I don’t like girls like you, you know. Ice queen plus no figure to speak of. I like broads who actually have some feeling.”

Chane’s hand clasped tightly over her shoulder as she faced this figure from her past. She didn’t know what to do. Perhaps her father sent him – in which case she couldn’t just do him in.

“Don’t bother with the knife, okay? Lemme tell you, even though there’s been some shit between us, I didn’t come for a fight today.”

Chane didn’t move her hand away from her knife, and just waited to see what Spike would do. He showed Chane the palms of his hands as a gesture of peace, but his words were still provoking.

“Tch...you don’t believe me? Whatever then. I came here today on behalf of my master, do a little something for him. We wanna ask you, as the daughter of Huey Laforet, a question. You better answer like a good little girl.”

Chane narrowed her eyes at this. This man...he hailed her as the daughter of Huey Laforet. And...on behalf of his master. There was no way that his “master” meant Huey.

Well then. That settled things.

Chane paced her breathing, and decided that the first chance she got, she could slice the tendons on his ankles. She started to look for an opportune time, and slowly all of her muscles tensed in preparation.

She couldn’t tell whether Spike noticed. He just continued to leer at her and continued to run off at the mouth.

“Oh, what the hell. Even if you answered my question, it’ll prolly be bullshit, so nah, I don’t wanna hear it. So how do you think we ought to communicate?”



Chane had stopped listening to the meaning behind his words. She waited until he took a breath to continue. "I guess there's Braille, eh? But the simplest ----"

At this moment, Chane launched hard off the ground and shot like a cannonball towards Spike, her right hand drawing her knife and her left hand drawing her dagger. With her speed and strength, she wanted to annihilate Spike, but as she sprang forward ----

"Ha! Didn't bring a translator?"

She flew into the air.

--- !?

She didn't feel a thing – she was sure she wasn't attacked, yet she was flung high up. This alarmed her. Her breathing was ragged, but in an instant she found her balance and managed to avoid slamming down to the ground. She landed on her feet and spun around to find that Spike was standing behind her, completely still and as if nothing had happened.

But something was different. Beside Spike was a dark shadow of a man.

He was dressed completely in black and wearing black boots. His outfit was like funeral clothes, which clashed with his golden hair. On his head was a hunter's cap, lowered over his eyes, and she couldn't see anything above his nose.

He wasn't like Spike, and Chane had never seen him before. But she was sure he did something to make her fly into the air like that.

Spike let out a mock sigh at Chane's tight expression. "Hmm...I suppose that was the filly being thrown just now? You really deserve your reputation, Felix."

--- Felix?

Chane knew this name. In a way, it was a name she heard everyday.

The person she was waiting to meet – Claire Stanfield – to everyone else, he was called Felix Walken.

This man before her looked a lot like Claire, but for her, they seemed like two completely different people. What was alike between them was their aura of lethality.

The man in the black outfit was silent for a while, but then sighed in exasperation and turned to Spike to correct him.

"...how many times do I have to say it before you get it?"

"What? You mean that stuff about the name 'Felix Walken' being passed to someone else? Whatever. You just wanna forget your past, but ditching your name will do no good. You don't have a name now, and for gigs like this, you gotta have a name."

The man didn't look at the smiling Spike, but turned to study Chane. "I'd like to ask something, Chane Laforet. If you answer me, I'll let you go." His tone was placid and his words simple and straightforward.

"And we'll let your so-called 'friends' off the hook, too, ahahaha!"

--- !?

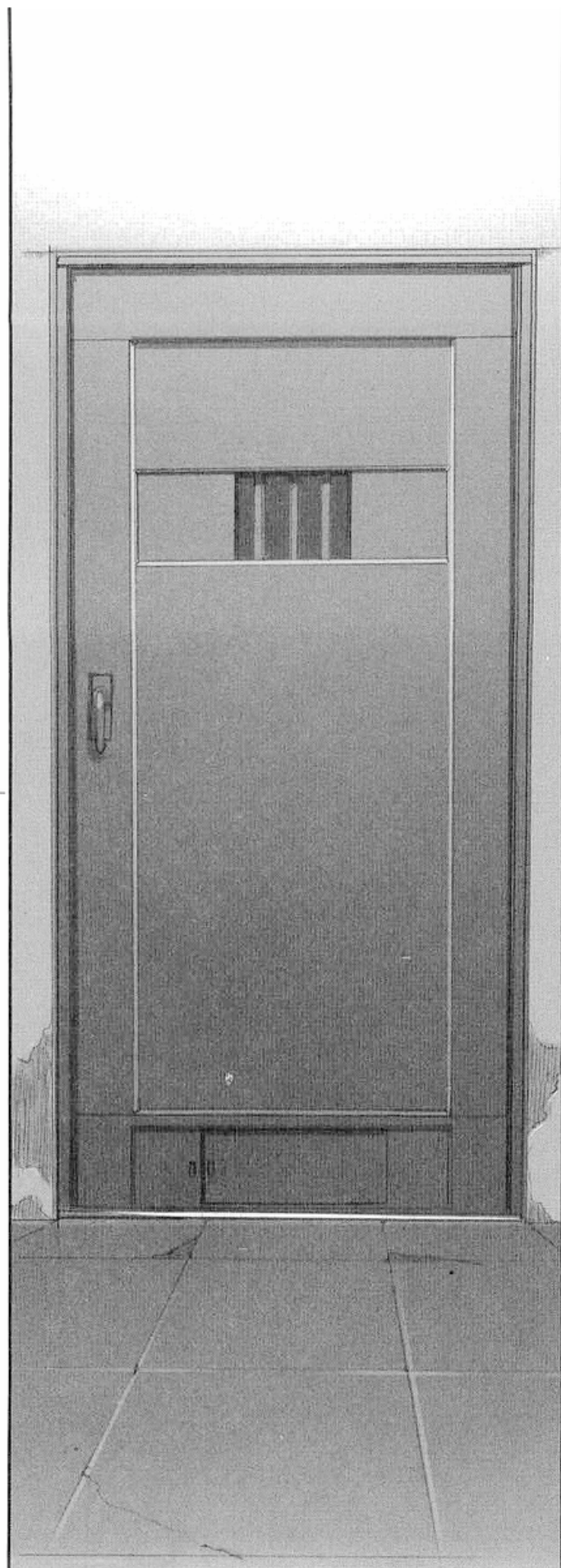
“C’mon, we’re askin’ you a question! You don’t believe me? Normally I’d croak rats like that one with the tattoo, but hey, I got no beef with them, really. Thanks to Huey, I got a new employer, who’s more generous, too.”

The man in the dark clothes again turned to Spike in annoyance. “You really need to learn how to be quiet,” he said, and then he turned again to Chane and resumed his questioning.

“I have one thing to ask you, Chane Laforet. Your father, Huey...what’s he planning to do in New York?”

闇の中で

間章 I



## **Interlude : In the Darkness**

(Alcatraz: underground)

On Alcatraz, there were cells called “The Dungeons.”

Even among the oldest and toughest prisoners, they were feared above all other punishments.

After the long corridor of regular cells called “Broadway,” deep in the recesses of the Dungeons, there was a single chamber converted from a store room into solitary confinement. Because it had been used to store military equipment, there wasn’t anything else there, not even a light, and prisoners who disturbed the peace were shoved into this dark hole.

The walls were earth, and soft, so it was theoretically possible to create a tunnel. However, all the prisoners sent here had their legs heavily shackled.

Director Johnston would eventually object to shackling the prisoners in this way. And after D Block was built, this underground room wouldn’t really be used. But that was a long time later, and back then this was the infamous “Darkness” whispered among the inmates.

However, deeper than even this “Darkness” was another location. This location was so deep that it wasn’t even on the Alcatraz blueprints...

And he was there.

It was a holding cell specifically constructed for one man. It might have been a hidden storage room during the war, but legends also say that it was a place for people to hide from the bloody conflict above. But no one who lived back then remained, so the truth was lost.

It was a solitary cell and not very big – about the size of a single hotel room. But there were pipes on the walls to deliver water, and there were daily amenities like for the other prisoners. Among them were things not found in other prisoners’ cells, like soap and teacups. One remarkable difference from the other cells of the Dungeons was that an electric light lit up the room, and so the likelihood of the prisoner going barking mad was smaller too.

The warden who was assigned to watch over this cell didn’t come often. He was here now, though, and spoke with a soft voice as if he was acting in a romance onstage.

“So, what is the situation?”

The electric light showed two men.

“Oh yes. After the immortal Isaac discovered him, he spoke to Ladd Russo for a while, and then did nothing.”

The two men spoke with one on each side of the door, and the uniformed warden stood in the sharp streaks of light emanating from the bars of the door.

The voices passed through the flap at the bottom of the door for delivering food. A few feet away from the door sat a man – Huey Laforet.

“I heard there have been three other prisoners who arrived with him?”

“The detailed reasons escape me...but so far, there hasn’t been any movement from them.”

“So, even your ‘network’ failed to find out anything more?”

“It’s not that. I have looked into their backgrounds already, but nothing suspicious turned up. And also...my selves in Washington and Chicago are being destroyed. Mostly from accidents, sudden deaths in my sleep. From the looks of it, my presence in Washington has already been discovered.”

The warden went on with such seemingly nonsensical topics for a long time, but the prisoner just gave a small sigh and cut him off.

“I understand. But our tasks in prison still depend on you, Sham.”

“Yes sir.”

The warden gave a polite bow, and then with a strange painstaking mechanicalness, turned back to the passage that would carry him above ground. He disappeared into the end of the passage, and only his footsteps continued to reverberate through the darkness.

Huey heard the footsteps fade, and then turned to a corner of the room. Another cot, like that of the other prisoners, was added to the room in the corner, and Huey directed his attention to the figure on the bed.

“Leeza...Leeza, wake up.”

“Mmmmmmm...”

The soft murmur of a girl came from the bed.

She rubbed her sleepy eyes but then came instantly alert, full of boundless energy.

“Good morning, Papa!” Her voice was clear and crisp.

A girl who woke up chipper was extremely out of place in Alcatraz, but nonetheless she smiled happily at Huey. Faced with her smile, the corners of Huey’s lips turned up slightly, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“Good morning. How is the situation?” Unlike her energetic voice, his was still level and soft.

“Oh yeah! Progress is great, and Sham did really well! Oh, but...there seems to be...some...strange people...”

“Strange people?”

“Everyone’s investigating still, so I can’t really say. But if they’re enemies, I’m sure if everyone worked together, we can finish them off. So no need to worry.”

Her shiny black hair, sparkling golden eyes and her playful tone of voice were all those of a typical little girl, yet the words coming from her lips were nothing like what a child would say.

Huey thought about this for a while, and, still smiling, put his left hand over the girl’s forehead.

“Ah, I see. If anything follows, tell me.”



“Okay! So we’re going on as planned, right?” The girl nodded happily and skipped to the corner of the room.

Huey’s smile disappeared as she turned away. He spoke a name to the still air of the cell. “His intelligence is severely lacking at present, but you should still keep a close eye on Victor.”

The girl turned her head and seemed to concentrate on furiously tuning something inside herself.

“Alrighty. Will do. You know, this Victor’s really obnoxious.”

“Ahaha...is that so?” Huey smiled in casual agreement, and as he did so he remembered a conversation with Victor – it was the day he was brought to this cell, and the last private words exchanged between them.

“We’ll have you licking our boots in time, Huey, because we got a cell prepared just for you in Alcatraz.”

--- Sigh. What happened to cutting me open for research? Or interrogating me? If it is true that you can hear the cries of the prisoners from across the water, then my intelligence network would have no trouble operating.

“None of that. Actually, some higher-ups in the government would really like to see what’s underneath your skin, and Nebula would really like to get their hands on you too. But don’t worry. Or rather, I might as well say, you might as well give up any hopes of resistance now. If you have any spare energy left, you can use that to thank us. You will, Huey – just watch!”

--- give up hope?

“Listen up, trash. You’re just a douchebag who doesn’t have an ounce of understanding for human feeling, but you’re also a genius, a mad, dangerous genius, and you don’t look bad either. People will be bound to be deceived by you. You can run whatever experiments you like for the next year. Even if you kill yourself everyday for the next 374 days, be my guest. If you want to try and manipulate other people, go ahead.”

---

“You wouldn’t think so, but those politicians and researchers are naïve compared to you. I’d give them three days before they fall under your spell. I know your drill. You’d whisper some honey words to them in the beginning, the dribble venom into their ears with your forked tongue. Until some researcher would even decide, 'He's not a bad guy; if I'm more frank with him I'm sure he'll tell me what I need to know.' What a joke. Your poison would have jumbled his brain to the point it could run out of his nostrils. At this point he might even be convinced to loosen your shackles...and then on such and such a day we'd find everyone in the lab massacred and you gone. And then they'd start screaming at me, 'What...what is this?? Locate him immediately, Talbot! This is your responsibility!' I'm telling you, I refuse to let this scenario happen. Let me repeat, I REFUSE!”

--- Such absolutism. And what a vivid imagination you have, Victor.

“Did you say imagination? Imagination is completely useless for trying to understand your twisted psyche. Is there anyone who you can say that truly understands you? Anyone?? Can you even think of one example?”

--- Elmer, or Denkuro...

“You're actually giving examples?? Do I look stupid? Do you really hate me so much?”

--- Absolutely not! My powers are limited - I cannot deceive people such as them.

“You really need to desist. To ordinary humans, we immortals are poison ourselves. I've already decided to retreat into my flask, but you're like airborne virus. Under such circumstances, there's no way I can let you run free.”

--- Well, why don't you devour me?

“You must be joking. Your ‘memories’ can be a trap. Suppose you hypnotized yourself at some point in the past to later one day declare ‘I am Huey.’ If I eat you, I'll fall into your trap. Because if your hypnotism was strong enough, when your consciousness in my mind declares itself to be Huey, you'll utterly drag my consciousness in as well. That would be folly.”

---

“What? Too many stars, can't count them?”

--- Oh no, no...all right, I admit that might be part of it. But Victor, don't you think you possess talents to be a playwright? It fascinates me.

“Really? Well, you can watch your own play unfold in your cell.”

--- And I was considering speaking with you at length.

“I refuse. I don't believe that I can out-talk you in a rational conversation. Thank God our roles are that of an agent and a criminal. I never wanted you to understand anything about me, and I'm not interested in understanding you. I am locking you up with all due procedures and no waste of breath.”

--- Ah, you're still such a crude person.

“I do have some sympathy left. You won't see the sunshine for a long time, and for that, I pity you. Maybe it's all for the best – you won't know just how many years are going by. But when Nebula is taken care of, you will be released with all due procedures.”

Victor's smug face swam in Huey's vision before it was replaced by the walls of his cell. As if he couldn't help himself, Huey said, “Life without sunshine isn't as bad as he said.” His voice was soft, and only he himself could hear it. “But...I do miss the starry night skies.”

Huey gave a slight smile and stood up slowly.

“It looks like I will have to leave this place, Victor...”

Huey turned to look at the little girl beside him, who was sitting on the bed and swinging her feet. Very seriously, he said, “Leeza, contact the Twins.”

“Alright, Papa!” she jumped down from the bed in excitement.

Again, Huey's voice was level in contrast. “From this moment on, all designated areas and people within them shall be my research subjects.”

There was neither joy nor sadness in his words.

Yet his voice was still level, even indifferent.

Huey announced his grand plans like it was a routine decision. On the other hand, it was a final, determined, incontrovertible one.



第三章表

監獄ライフを満喫しよう

## Chapter 3 - Part 1 : Let's Enjoy Prison Life

(Alcatraz prison, single-cell block, night)

“Hey hey, you there next door.”

The person sounded like he was talking to himself, but it went across the thin wall to reach Firo's ears.

“You the one who arrived with me today right?”

Firo had been lying in bed, bored out of his mind. This was the first time he heard anyone's voice in his cell. It seemed that the prisoner next door was greeting him by pressing himself up against the bars.

Although chatting was forbidden, a little talk when the warden wasn't around didn't do any harm, either. If the warden was approaching, his footsteps would give him away long before he got there. The prisoners developed a system where they would immediately return to their beds to feign sleep upon hearing the warden's footsteps.

The prisoner next door seemed to be the Asian man with the tattoos.

“Oh, yeah I guess so.”

Firo remembered what the Vice-director had said before he was assigned his cell. That before he understood the three men's intentions, he shouldn't trust them. So Firo decided to be alert.

“You were taken away for a chat right? About what?”

“...Nothing much. They just questioned me about my pals outside. They seem to think I'm a Mafioso or something, so I just made some stuff up.”

“I see...and what are you getting locked up for?”

“Hm? Oh, for beating someone up.”

Firo couldn't see the man, and felt even more uncertain about him. Of course, it was the same situation every time he made a phone call, but the person was right beside him, and it made things unnerving. It was the first time Firo was speaking to someone so close to him like this.

He wondered what expression or attitude the man – the criminal – across the wall had in response to what he said, and worried about what kinds of things he could make up.

In contrast, the other man seemed extremely cheerful. “Oh yeah? Really?”

“?”

“And afterwards? They'd only send you here if you did something really really nasty.”

--- Oh, right.

Other than he and Huey, who were special cases, there wasn't one inmate who was sent here directly after being declared guilty. They were all transferred from other prisons for being too hard to handle.



--- Er, so why is Isaac here?

Firo pondered about this question in the back of his mind as he continued to talk with the other man. "Oh, after that, I beat up the wardens."

"....."

"What? Is that really so far-fetched?" He was just trying to bullshit his way past this guy, but now found it was rather difficult indeed. Perhaps tomorrow they'd beat him up for lying on the evidence that such a baby-faced young man as he was couldn't hurt anyone.

The other man just laughed. "Ahaha, really? So that's it...I see...In that case, that's not too far from me."

"...you too?"

"Yeah, the warden's neck went 'CRUNCH'."

"... 'crunch'?" Hearing this sound effect, Firo felt a chill run down his spine.

"That's right! Have you heard about live-eating? It's when you eat your food while it's still alive. The 'crunch' when you bite down...it sends such a delightful tremor through my teeth. Plus the faintly salty taste, the texture on my tongue..."

"Okay I get it..." "Oh, the memories...the feeling of biting down on his neck...the tang of blood...! And the chorus of screams and the sounds of their brawl....delicious! So delicious my brain was melting!"

He went on like this rapturously as if he had forgotten about Firo, so Firo decided there was no point in being polite in return. He would be honest. "That's disgusting."

"You think so? Isn't eating a basic human drive? I'm just going by our normal instincts."

After this, the only sounds from next door were cracking and jaw-snapping noises. It was a horrible sound to listen to, right beside Firo's ear. Crunch crunch crunch snap snap snap.

--- What a horrible guy. Does he have to express himself with his teeth? ...Oh.

The other inmate reminded Firo of someone else.

That someone also had a pair of bloodshot red eyes to go with two rows of sharp teeth, and Firo's impression of him was that he was a demon.

...perhaps this guy still can't compare to him. So...what should I do...?

Firo decided that he would try to learn more about the other inmate's background. And in some ways, it was better to get closer to other inmates in this kind of place.

Firo got as close to the bars as he could. "Hey, what's your name?"

"Huh? Oh, right, when the guards come patrolling, they just use our numbers right? Ok. How's this...'cuz of my M.O., they call me 'Dragon,' even though my name's really Ryuujiro. It's a mouthful for you Americans, right?"

“Okay, Dragon, my name is –”

Firo was just going to use a fake name, but then remembered that he couldn't use a fake name in front of other immortals, and he didn't know who this man was. But Dragon cut in. “I know already. You're called Firo, right? That joker today was yelling so loud everyone could hear it.”

“.....”

“You know who I mean, the guy they sent away. You know him from outside? Or did you meet in another prison or something?”

“Oh...oh well, it's a long story...” How to explain his background – or how not to explain it – was making Firo's head hurt.

Suddenly, a distinct sound echoed through the prison.

If Firo had a say in such matters, he would never want to hear that sound again. It was a sound both familiar and provoking.

“A gunshot...?”

“Hmm? Yeah, probably.”

This sound unsettled Firo immensely. His brow furrowed.

From next door came more crunching and snapping noises.

“Maybe someone's trying to escape. If our warden friends decide to shoot, well, give them hell. Hee hee.”

“Oh whatever. You can hear gunshots like that everyday. If you worry about it you'd go crazy.”

“Really? It's just...?”

The next day, during breakfast, Firo asked Ladd about the gunshots he heard yesterday, but Ladd didn't look surprised at all. He just waved his spoon and dispelled Firo's suspicions. “It's just the wardens drilling. So they could shoot misbehaving inmates or anyone who might try to break out.”

“Okay, so it was just for possible escapees?”

“You don't believe me? This place is full of gang bosses you know. There's been underlings coming in boatloads to free their boss.”

“Sensational.” Firo wanted to say as little as possible and end this discussion, but Ladd would talk non-stop as soon as he stopped eating.

“Ah, to tell you the truth, the security on this island's great.”

“...how so?”

“The wardens are all mentally prepared – they're all mentally prepared to lose their life.” And then Ladd showed the same carnivorous smile he revealed yesterday at lunch.

While his words had an aggressive edge, he was also giving Firo some tips about prison life.

“The wardens are mentally prepared to shoot down anyone who tries to run, but at the same time they also know that they might die at our hands too. I wouldn’t annoy them – I’m telling you, as a fellow inmate – especially to types like you.”

“Types like me?”

“Ahh, the first time I saw you here – your eyes were spinning around wildly, like you didn’t know when your last day on Earth would be. The expression on your face was like you were saying, ‘everyone here is an enemy’.”

“Uh, really?”

--- Did I really have such an expression on my face?

Then he might as well have alerted all the other inmates to his presence – plus Huey’s subordinates.

Ladd looked at the preoccupied Firo for a moment, then lowered his voice. “Luckily, I’m only enormously irritated by guys who look all placid on the outside...or ones who believe they’re invincible. They rub me in a very very very wrong way. Savvy?”

“...not really...”

“They must be taught a lesson. They need to know that they’re walking a very thin line. They need to appreciate this fact with every fibre of their body, heart, and being. I love teaching them that...so here I am.”

“Oh...”

--- So, this guy is a hitman. Firo couldn’t help but remember Claire. In some ways he’s rather like Claire.

Then another inmate finished his breakfast. He patted his thin belly, which showed no evidence that he’d eaten, and interrupted Firo’s thoughts. “Hyaaaa! I’m full I’m full! Oh right Firo, don’t you think we’re getting great treatment in here? Awesome. No wonder my salary’s so low! They’ve put it all into our food!”

Isaac’s smiling face was exactly like it was outside prison, and Firo didn’t know whether to laugh or cry about this.

--- So spirited even though he was locked in solitary...

“Hey, were you okay last night?”

“Hmm? Oh right, the wardens got annoyed and locked me up again. No worries – I’m used to it already.”

“...used to it...”

Firo frowned at Isaac but Ladd, sitting beside him, smiled and started explaining. “Oh, this fellow’s always pulling off some crazy stunts and getting locked in solitary. Because they’re just minor, he’s usually in there for just a day. But for most people, even one trip to the Dungeons will make them behave.”



Firo understood but had a new question. “So, were you locked there too?”

“The longest I’ve stayed there is ten days. It was awful. No lights, utter darkness – you feel absolutely nothing in there. You forget to eat. After I got out, I asked around and then found out I was gone for ten days. Because I couldn’t hear the gunshots underground to mark the time... anyway, it’s pretty nasty. They lock your feet together so you can’t move, complete darkness, not a single sound. Imagine that. You’d want to be freed after even one minute. You know, afterwards, I heard that a guy was locked in there for fourteen days, and then he went coo-coo. He was kept in the prison hospital for a while but then we never heard from him again.”

Firo heard all of this and couldn’t help swallowing and then looking at Isaac in awe. “Oh man, Isaac, even though it was one night at a time, you could still...”

“Hmm? It was just one night. It was nothing.”

“You don’t think that’s really...really amazing?”

“If you want to talk about amazing...yesterday a fairy visited me! So I wasn’t bored at all.”

Fairy.

Firo stared for a moment and then shook his head wearily.

“Isaac, there you go again.”

“No, I tell you, it’s the truth! I heard the voice of a little girl, and I talked to her for hours!”

“Isaac...I’m sorry...I should have known that after being apart from Mira for so long, you’d...”

“No no no...okay, yes, it’s lonely without Miria, but the voice I heard was real! She was asking about you! I’m sure she’s like Tinkerbelle!”

“...Oh c’mon, don’t drag me into it.”

Firo sighed again at Isaac’s grossly bizarre imagination.

“Right...the fairy asked me all sorts of weird questions about you, like what’s my relationship with you, and something about whether you’ve drank some wine or elixir or something –”

“---!?”

Firo instantly snapped out of his exasperation.

Whether he drank an elixir.

It wasn’t just anyone who would say that to Isaac. For Firo, this question had enormous significance.

The elixir of immortality?

At the same time, Firo started to form a hunch about the fairy that Isaac was going on about. Isaac didn’t know about the elixir of immortality, and didn’t have any reason to invent it.

--- It might have all been some kind of test from Huey.



Firo wanted to ask Isaac about it in more detail, but since outsiders like Ladd surrounded him, he couldn't. He had to wait for a more opportune time and let Isaac go for now.

"Ok, I get it..."

"You still don't believe me! How can I keep telling my story if you don't believe in fairies?"

"You tell me."

"What?" Isaac looked at the ceiling as he considered Firo's riposte. "Hmm...how indeed...how should I put it...What do you think, Firo?"

"...How should I know?"

For the second time this morning, Firo wanted to end a conversation as soon as possible, but Ladd cut in.

"You should consider yourself lucky. You met a fairy, after all."

"Yes! That's right! That's right, Firo, you just wait and see!"

His voice attracted the attention of the wardens.

"You're too loud."

"I want a quiet breakfast from all of you."

Their commands echoed through the dining hall, and it instantly quietened. You could hear a pin drop.

Firo was suddenly caught up by another concern, and to avoid drawing attention, he knocked his spoon off the table on purpose and bent to retrieve it. While he was bent over, he whispered a question to Ladd.

"Hey...when you were talking about people who irritate you, did you mean someone like him? Someone with no idea of the trouble he's in?"

"Nah. I've been watching him for weeks. Let's put it this way – don't you think he's a total sap? His head's gone completely beyond oblivious. He just can't get a rise out of me."

Firo let out a sigh of relief that Isaac hadn't managed to irk Ladd. "Oh ok. I see."

"What what? What about my head?" Isaac said in a low voice. It looked like the wardens' reprimands had some effect after all.

Firo just laughed and tapped Isaac on the head with the spoon he'd just retrieved. "Your head didn't piss Ladd off."

"Hmm? What's that mean? Oh, I get it! It means you're not angry with me. Thank you! You're such a wonderful person!"

Even though Isaac completely missed the point, his response wasn't exactly wrong, either, so neither Firo nor Ladd sought to correct him.

Meal times weren't very long, but it was more than enough to eat one's fill, so the prisoners ate leisurely and chatted.

"So, you're from New York?"

"You could say that."

"I've been all over America, so you might as well say that I'm just from America!"

There was an expression of nostalgia on Ladd's face as he heard the name of the city. "Ahh...New York...I've got a mate in New York, like a little brother. He's a weirdo – he needs to dismantle stuff to keep himself from feeling crappy. With a huge wrench the size of my arm. He'd often talk non-stop while he's taking apart cars. Usually, after I roll the driver he'd have all the parts lying on the ground."

"Sensational...um...?"

"What's the matter, Firo? Ahahaha! Are you worried about Ennis because she's a driver too? Don't worry! Our bro here's a nice guy!"

"No, not worried. Hey, Ladd, this guy you mentioned, does he wear a blue uniform? Bluer than ours?"

Isaac clapped his hand, his memory jogged by what Firo had said. "Oh! I saw him together with Miria! I think he knows Jacuzzi too."

"Hey hey hey hey, what what what? You know that kid? You know Graham?"

"Oh, I heard that he recently tangled with the Runoratas."

At this, Ladd's expression turned into one of thoughtfulness. Then, he began talking about the future in a serious tone of voice.

"...Right then. I must help him when I get out. And my fiancée is still waiting for me in New York."

Firo stared at Ladd in surprise. "Your fiancée? What were you thinking, landing in a place like this with a fiancée?"

"I told you, I have an objective."

"You mean your objective is to escape and reunite with her, right? That's great."

"My objective is to meet Miria again!"

Because he was thinking about Miria, Isaac started getting loud again, and the wardens again had to chastise him. "You lot! Shut up and eat."

Firo and Isaac glanced at the furious guard stalking towards their table and quickly bent their heads over their plates.

But – another incident followed.

“Cut it out, you buffoon!”

The sounds of metal utensils clashing echoed through the dining hall, and the centre of the dining hall was engulfed in a mass of shouting.

All the wardens and inmates looked over to see a Caucasian inmate lifted high into the air, perhaps even two metres, his limbs jerking uselessly in protest. Around his throat was a dark-skinned and scarred hand, belonging to the huge African American. He dangled the other man one-handed as if hanging laundry.

“Urrgh...uuugh...” The Caucasian man was gasping for his life.

He tried every tactic possible to escape the other inmate’s clutches. However, he was a very small person and the huge hand around his throat didn’t budge.

“They...”

Firo immediately recognized who they were.

The Caucasian and the African American, like “Dragon,” arrived with him the day before.

The African American tilted his scarred face towards the man in his grip. “You asshole, yesterday on the boat you were badmouthing me the whole way, weren’t you? And just now you gave me the evil eye, didn’t you? Do my scars look that funny to you? Do they?”

“Uh – uh – I didn’t say nothing...”

The African American disregarded what he just said and tightened his grip.

“Hey, Gig, cut it out.”

Some of the other African American inmates tried to hold him back, but he paid them no heed. Instead he started to tighten his grip on the other man’s neck.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Stop this instant!”

The wardens rushed towards them like they advanced on Isaac the day before, but they looked completely different – tense and fearful.

Firo wondered what fate awaited that big man. He and his companions could only watch the events unfold from the sidelines.

But this intention didn’t seem to apply to everyone.

“Ah...all for the best...this must be happening for a reason. Don’t you think so, Firo?”

“What?” Someone beside him rose and Firo looked up in confusion.

“Hey, but this ‘all the best’ has no clear meaning, really. The best choice for oneself is constantly changing, don’t you think? With your health, the weather, your mood, your dear friends, sworn enemies, the weak who deserve their end, the strong who deserve admiration...in the end they’d all

die. When you try to manipulate events around you, the best element among them all the very best, is what you consider important enough that you won't regret laying down your life."

Firo was unsettled by this new spiel.

"All right, be right back."

"Hey Ladd, where're you going?"

"A wonderful place. The one path before me leads me to kill the red monster and the one called Huey Laforet."

"Hu – what??"

Totally unexpected, Firo caught the name "Huey Laforet" in the hubbub.

The cruel, wolfish smile had appeared on Ladd's face once more. He turned to look at the African American who was at the centre of the commotion, and said something strange.

"When our good man here mentioned the fairy, I got a little curious. Whether it's the spice or life or off to hell, things will turn out for the best."

His attention was far from Isaac and Firo now.

"The best best best...the awesomest."

With this, all that remained in the air was a strong murderousness.

"Don't move!"

"Settle down!"

The wardens surrounded the African American and drew their batons.

The other prisoners where either crowded around the scene as well or purposefully ignoring it and staring at the small pits in the ceiling.

The pits in the ceiling were outlets to spray tear gas in the event of an all-out riot, but the rumours among the prisoners was that the gas would be poison gas.

"You asking him or me?" Gig tightened his grip on the other man's neck again and turned to yell in his face. "You heard them. Settle down!"

"...Ugh.....kkk...hhh....."

The Caucasian man didn't seem to be breathing, and his face was slowly turning blue. At this rate, two possible deaths were eminent – either from suffocation or from a snapped neck. The wardens realized this and prepared to step in.

Just then, another figure flew into the fray from the gap between the wardens. All they saw of the figure was a smile from spotting prey.

It was definitely not a hunter's smile, nor was it something on the face of an animal predator. It had nothing to do with happiness, and it had nothing to do with instinct. It went against all that was humane and all that was human.

A cruel smile, a serial killer's smile.

"Hi there."

"Huh...?" Gig was surprised to hear this sunny greeting and looked down to see what was going on. For a brief moment, he saw a figure a head shorter than him, and then suddenly pain shot through the side of his abdomen and he heard something in his body break.

All through this incident, he had been prepared to face the wardens' batons, but this pain utterly exceeded the pain he was expecting. It wouldn't be too much to say that this pain was greater than any other pain he had endured in his life.

He dropped the man he was choking on reflex and began to curl his body into a ball. But before the pain had subsided, another lance of pain went through his stomach.

That must have been bullets from the wardens, he thought, but there were still people moving close around him, and he didn't seem to have been shot.

His face filled with pain, he heard the chipper voice again, closer this time.

"Ah, now we're the same height." It sounded like something an old friend might say after years apart.

"I can't believe how easy that was."

Gig raised his head to see his opponent's left hand coming towards him. It was a hand without flesh and bones, a distorted metal hand, like that of Captain Hook in the Peter Pan stories. Then his pain-addled gaze went further to see who this mysterious man was. He could only see that the man had turned his torso away.

"Well, that's all I have to say. On the whole, mostly, really, totally...."

"...Ah..."

"Too easy."

The man spun back like a top, and before Gig could take a good look at what he looked like, the other man had already grabbed his face.

"--- ---"

Then the punch came and Gig passed out. His huge body flew backwards and flipped over mid-flight, knocking down a warden and one cafeteria table along the way.

The crashing reverberated through the dining hall.

All guns were pointed towards Ladd, and other wardens were hurrying in to secure the rest of the dining hall.



“What? You again?”

Ladd just shrugged. “Hey hey hey, why so serious? Wasn’t that justifiable self-defence? You ought to be writing me a letter of thanks and then cutting my sentence down to half a year for that.”

The wardens eyed each other and drew in to make their circle tighter. None of them seemed to want to come too close to Ladd – perhaps he’d done something to them before. They were as cautious around him as though he was an armed gunman.

Ladd pointed to the small Caucasian man whimpering at his feet. “The big guy was going to throw this one to crush me. I was just defending myself – hey, if I waited one more second, the one dead would be me.”

“You think that’s a good enough reason?”

“Of course not – you’d all have to be a reasonable bunch for it to be a good reason. But don’t you all just send inmates to the Dungeons and ask questions later? Admit it! I trusted that you’d act this way – you’re all so conscientious. I knew that if I didn’t act out for so long it’ll just take one incident to finish things off.”

The wardens all stared at Ladd, who was smiling and didn’t seem the least concerned about the guns pointing at him. Instead he turned to Firo and Isaac, who were watching him from further away. “All right then, New York it is. If we make it alive, I’ll see you in New York.”

Isaac watched Ladd be taken away and started yammering excitedly. “Oh man, the big guy was gonna get Ladd! It was really scary, wasn’t it? Oh man oh man.”

“Quiet for a sec...” Firo reached over and covered Isaac’s mouth with his hand. He also stared at the disappearing Ladd. This man, who had just said goodbye so cheerfully, who was he really?

He had immediately reacted to Isaac’s mention of Huey by running over to a prison brawl, so he must have something up his sleeve. His behaviour in prison and his assault today made Firo think that he wasn’t just an average inmate who could be taken lightly. Firo needed to keep an eye on him in the future.

Firo understood that this was Alcatraz – many of the prisoners here weren’t here because they were criminals, but because they had some other motive. He began to break out in a cold sweat.

Firo was puzzled. Where did that leave Isaac? What sort of ulterior motive could he have?

“Uh, Isaac, so how come you’re here?”

Isaac looked at Firo as if to ask why he was asking this question now, but didn’t seem to suspect anything. “Oh, because they told me that I won’t be going to a normal prison, but it’d be a shorter sentence if I come to Alcatraz. My sentence is only fifty days!”

“Why would they give you such a weird sentence? Who was it anyway?”

“Oh, it was some top cop guy called Victor. I think it was him.”

Firo had been expecting something like this, and Victor’s obnoxious bespectacled face appeared before his eyes.

--- I don't think Isaac mentioning Ennis is meant to intimidate me...so is this a precaution, or a trap?

If Firo had refused to cooperate with Victor from the beginning, or if something happened and Firo couldn't do his part, then perhaps Victor might use Isaac as bait to lure Ennis out, and then use Ennis as bait to keep Firo in line. This line of reasoning made Firo furious, and his hands balled into fists. Blood welled from where his nails cut into his palms, but then crept back towards the cuts as if nothing had happened.

...that damned inspector...

間違いは素直に認めましょう

第三章裏



## Chapter 3 - Part 2 : Just Admit You're At Fault

(Temporary investigation headquarters, somewhere in New York)

“So, subordinates of the brilliant me, tell me what you’ve gathered.”

This old office was only used by a small number of agents. Victor, who had just woken from a short doze, clapped his hands at the other agents to announce that work will resume. Sleepy looks and sleepy voices greeted him in answer.

“No offence, but you should really just say ‘my brilliant subordinates’.”

“This is just my personal opinion, but productivity depends a lot on honesty towards yourself and your employees.”

“All right, get to work. If you need to look at the records so far, the organized and bound copies are right there.”

Victor shut out his subordinates’ complaints and mulled silently over all the intelligence they had gathered. He looked over the information on Alcatraz, and then looked at Bill and Edward severely. “This is no time for jokes. Huey’s underlings are about to start their operation – don’t be surprised if everyone in New York vanishes.”

“Why’d they do something so stupid?” Edward laughed.

“Don’t underestimate them.” Victor cut off Edward’s joking voice and started to discuss Huey.

“What a freak. And he says that he’s doing experiments. Among all the immortals, he has the most distinctions, yet he cares for nothing and no one. In the end he considers everyone his experimental subjects. He’s just like Maiza – not only do they practice alchemy, they’ve also ventured into sorcery...”

“Ah, so Huey’s a magician, right?”

“No, no. Nothing so romantic and fanciful. When he had no more paths to follow he became a ‘researcher,’ an ‘investigator’... but once he reaches his objective, the objective just becomes a component of another new experiment. The ends he wants justify all his means, because to him the ends and means were never different things. So even if you manage to guess his objective, there’s no telling how he’s planning to reach it. If you make plans to stop him, your plans are probably already among his calculations. Dammit...you can’t even say whether this makes him unyielding or flexible...”

Bill spoke up with a despairing tone of voice. “Um...can you tell us whether you’re praising him or criticizing him?”

In contrast, Edward was still on task. “If we don’t know his motives, we can’t proceed. There’s nothing about him in Alcatraz? Firo really hasn’t gotten anything yet?”

“No, he hasn’t made any moves so far.” Upon hearing Firo’s name, Victor remembered his disastrous meeting in the Alveare, and tried to keep the annoyance out of his voice. “We can discount Firo for now, and...really...I never really expected him to bring us anything, but I’d be happy if he can tell us how Huey is communicating with his subordinates out here. Missouri contacted me, and told me that he heard from someone else that other special inmates were also sent in.”

Bill looked even more downcast. “Someone else...? Do you mean Nebula?”

Victor nodded, likewise downcast. “Maybe he got it out of Huey, or stole this information from another source...whatever the case, we can only be responsible for our part...” Victor realized that Edward was frowning at him. “What? What is it, Inspector Noah?”

“I felt like you were just about to say something else.”

“You mean about not being able to count on Firo?”

“Hmm? You’ve come to know him thoroughly, haven’t you? So you must have conflicting feelings about not being able to depend on him after all.”

“No, of course not. It’s just –”

Edward was about to say something else, but –

RRRRING-RRRRING-RRRRRIIIIIIIING-RRRRRING-RRRRRING-RRRRRIIIIIING ---

The harsh ringing of the telephone put a stop to their conversation.

Meanwhile, at the Alveare.

It was a regular day at the bar. The staff rushed here and there and the customers came and went. The Martillos, who had their base at the Alveare, found it convenient to do their business in the restaurant too, but were careful not to be visible when it was in its busiest hours. Now, in a corner sat a man who looked a little shady, swilling his wineglass and deep in thought.

--- ...to tell the truth, I didn’t expect that even you’ve managed to guess what I am.

--- Such unknowns make life interesting.

--- No matter. It’s just my personal way of doing things..

--- My power actually has no limits.

--- That’s why I chose to exercise my power to the utmost for this organization specifically.

--- In the past, even if I was working for this organization, it’s not like I did anything out of line.

--- ...other than locating the odd person here and there.

--- And things like helping inmates break out of prison, such blatant actions against the law...

--- Though I must admit, I once stole into prison to visit a friend.

--- No matter. Coming to ask for my help...

--- means to pull him squarely into this line of work.

--- Are you mentally prepared?

--- ...what a quandary for you. Ah, no matter.

--- In your heart, you know that you have been drawn to him.

--- It's precisely because of this fact that you are angsty over whether to change his fate or not, right?

--- Well, ponder it well, then. I'm in no hurry.

--- ...what? You're giving up?

--- Really, is that your decision? You might as well still have faith in him, and wait.

--- You control your own fate, but others do as well. Isn't that an inherent law of humanity?

--- All right. Last words now, as advice from a friend ---

--- You should go and stay with your friends.

--- At least it might cheer you up a bit.

--- Maybe he is really headstrong and even brash, but...

--- Isn't that what appeals to you about him?

--- Please, if you keep nodding so vigorously you'll embarrass me.

"Hmm..."

Recalling the events of a month prior, Ronnie Schiatta couldn't help letting a smile creep to the corners of his lips.

Maiza, who was sitting beside him, noticed this rare smile. "What, Ronnie? Your smile can be scary, you know."

"Hm? Oh, it's no great matter."

"Hey, something must be up. You don't often stare into space either."

"I was only recalling some instances about human love."

Maiza stared at him. The word "love" didn't often pass through the lips of someone like Ronnie. Maiza's thin eyes were full of questions, and looked extremely put out.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Are you trying to start a fight?"

"Uh, no, no, nothing like that!"

"Never mind then. Well, to turn the tables, you seem awfully worried about Firo too."

"Yes, because from the rumours about Alcatraz..."

"Don't worry. He'll be fine."

"How can you be sure...?"



Ronnie saw that Maiza still looked faintly upset. He decided to give Maiza his appraisal of Firo not as a demon or as an alchemist, but as a fellow Martillo member. “Firo is a Martillo capo first and an immortal second. Don Molsa Martillo didn’t make him a capo on a whim or from a bout of drunkenness.”

Maiza gave a rueful smile at his old friend’s words. “I suppose our living is really not fit for human beings.”

“It would be better if you were still an alchemist, right?”

“...no, although I have regretted calling you forth on that ship...I don’t regret where I am now.”

“Hmm...me neither.”

For a while, the two men sat, smiling slightly, clinking their glasses.

However, events took a sharp turn as the lunch guests were leaving: a strange news item crackled from the radio on the counter.

[.....z.....zz....so.....ba...related to.....investig.....]

[.....crkzz.....this was due to the widespread operations of a criminal organization.....]

The remaining guests all pricked up their ears and tried to short through the static. One waiter seemed especially interested in what was on, and went to fiddle with the tuning knob.

[.....live broadcast. Mass explosions and disappearances have occurred in Elson Hill, Illinois. It is said that Placido Russo has a hand in this, and the judiciary are currently investigating him and...]

Among those still in the Alveare were Randy and Peccho, and they immediately started to hotly discuss this topic.

“Placido Russo? The Chicago dude? Bombing? Disappearances? Oh man.”

“Looks like that Placido...ain’t he the Don of the Russos? He actually dares show up on the radio news! He has a long way to go if he wants to become Capone.”

“Oh well, even if it’s Placido Russo, he’s even going downhill in Chicago. He ain’t worth much of our attention now. What’s his backing? Car manufacture or somethin’?”

“So what’s up with these disappearances then?”

The two of them got nowhere with their conversation, and just continued to grin at each other. However, as the broadcast progressed, the atmosphere in the Alveare changed dramatically.

[Around three hundred locations have been planted with explosives. The number of injured and deceased are still uncertain at this point, but along with the explosives, there have been over two hundred people reported missing not only in the city of Chicago but also the surrounding areas. The citizens of Illinois are extremely alarmed by these ---]

“Three hundred?!”

“Two hundred people?!”

[In addition, Senator Manfred Beriam, who is in Chicago at this time –]

The radio continued to spin this bizarre news, but no one was listening anymore.

Maiza frowned. “It looks like there’s something sinister going on in Chicago.”

“That’s right.”

“Say, Elson Hill...isn’t that a Nebula base?”

Nebula was a nationally renowned conglomerate. They owned many buildings in Chicago, and also had branches and factories in Elson Hill.

“It’s an odd city. I heard that even its Mayor has connections with Nebula.”

“I also heard that in Elson Hill, sixty percent of the population are part of Nebula. What the hell... what’s Placido trying to do...it doesn’t look like the run of the mill from him.”

Although Maiza was only listening to a broadcast of a faraway event, it was so out of the blue that he was extremely worried. If it really was the doings of the Russo family – a crime family – then perhaps the entire country would be on higher alert and crack down on other gangs. It would be disastrous to a small organization like the Martillos.

--- whether it’s New York or Chicago...

Ronnie seemed to have thought of something. He analyzed the news on the radio and the intelligence he knew of, swilling his glass, muttering to himself. “Well, it isn’t like this is all...oh, no matter.”

“Well, I’ve seen what you’re capable of now, Huey Laforet. And the other immortals too.”

(Madison Square Gardens)

“So that’s our deal, Miss Chane Laforet. You’d be helping us lots if you just answer that question like a good girl.”

Spike’s leer made Chane clench her teeth and she reassess her situation. If it were just Spike on his own, she’d have no problem taking care of him. He might have been a sharp-shooter, but he was blind and had no gun, and so he definitely wouldn’t be able to defeat her.

However, it wasn’t that simple. There was the man beside him. Since Spike called him by the name Felix Walken, it looked like he was no average person. She had no knowledge about his talents or the skills he possessed; all she knew was that he could send her flying in the blink of an eye. That and his name made her nervous.

Felix Walken. Claire had mentioned him before. Claire was using this name because someone sold it to him. Previously, Felix Walken had supposedly been the greatest assassin in the New York area, almost a legend. And Claire had said that of all the opponents he had faced, it was solely Felix Walken who could go toe to toe with himself.

If this man before her was really the previous Felix Walken, then her situation just got a lot more complicated. However, Chane did not let herself be intimidated. She was not planning to run away.

If she was afraid of anything, it was that these two men might escape and harm Jacuzzi. And she would never forgive those who went against her father. She was going to make them reveal who their master was.

“Like I thought. I guess you will fight to the end.” The Felix Walken before her said quietly. He took out his hands, which he had been concealing in his pockets, turned towards her, and took a step forward.

--- He’s coming.

Change gripped the weapons in her hand, prepared to be the one to strike first and gain the upper hand, but then saw shadows rise up close to where she was standing.

“!?”

Ten or so men in black outfits rushed through the park gates. Half looked to be physically fit and strong, and the other half looked like average men, but regardless of which, they all stared at Chane with piercing eyes. She was strongly reminded of the Lemures.

Spike seemed to have discovered their arrival from their footsteps, and called out to them. “Over here – this little girl here.”

Although he looked supremely confident, not all the new arrivals did. “Mr. Spike, there’s been a problem.”

“What?”

“The radio. I just heard...”

“Huh? Wait a sec.” Spike’s expression suddenly changed to a frown and he cut off the man’s words.

“There’s an extra pair of footsteps.”

The first to react to his words was the former Felix Walken. His gaze swept the other men coldly and landed on one man.

It was difficult to say when he had shown up. Perhaps he had been there when Chane was assessing Felix. He now stood beside her, and one by one everyone else also realized his presence.

Finally, Spike also realized there was an unwelcomed guest. “And who the hell are you? You ain’t one of us right?”

The intruder looked back with a pair of clear, bright eyes. “If you have to ask, I can answer that with just one sentence.” His tone was confident, and he put an arm around Chane’s shoulders.

“I’m...well, me.”

The park lapsed into complete silence.

This answer was supposed to be frank but was instead maddeningly nonsensical. Neither Spike nor the men dressed in black knew how to respond to it.



Spike was the first one to collect himself. His former leer replaced the puzzlement on his face as he tried to provoke the intruder. “What the hell? Did you plan your entrance like some movie hero?”

The intruder didn’t take the bait. He just looked at Chane with what seemed to be embarrassment. “Um...well, I don’t usually do this you know. Arrive at the last moment. To tell the truth...from just now...”

“What?”

“Ah, well, I was in the park the whole time, watching Chane sitting under the tree. Her thoughtful expression is so cute.”

Chane blushed and looked at the man with a critical expression on her face.

“Oh, you don’t need to look at me like that, Chane. I swear it’s the truth. Very cute.”

“...!...!”

“You think this isn’t the right time? How come? I’d say that in this situation it’s even more important to admire Chane’s beauty, given how nasty those scumbags look.”

The man seemed to be carrying on a conversation with Chane, though of course no matter how hard Spike and his men strained to hear Chane, they couldn’t. She hadn’t released her tight grip on her weapons, and didn’t look like she even wanted to say anything.

Spike scowled, feeling as though these two were playing a prank on him.

“Wait wait! Of course this ain’t the right time! Hey, didn’t you hear me? Hey you!” The two of them seemed to be staring at one another, sunk completely into their own little world. Spike massaged his temples in frustration and waved a gun at them. “Who does he think he is, randomly butting into our business? You think you can leave without a scratch huh? You wanna die that bad?”

“And who’re you to ask me that?”

“What...!” Spike snarled, unable to believe his ears. He was the one being interrogated now?

--- Where this dweeb come from?

Aside from the fury filling his mind, Spike was on high alert. Although he didn’t know who this person was, he had a sense that he couldn’t be so easily taken care of.

Spike looked around at his men, hoping that someone might take the lead and attack. However, the former Felix Walken was still standing icily beside him, and the other black-clothed members of his party were awaiting his orders.

He felt himself start to sweat and told himself that he must act calmly in this situation. He tried to keep the feeling from his voice as he began to interrogate the intruder again.

“Okay, listen up. All you have to do is tell me your name, then we can decide how to settle this.”

Spike wasn’t expecting a good answer, so he was surprised when the man nodded briskly and answered. But his answer threw the situation into greater confusion. “Oh me. I’m Felix. Felix Walken.”

“...huh?”

Faced with this unexpected answer, Spike and his men swivelled their heads to stare at the former Felix. A slightly trapped expression crossed the former Felix’s face, and he didn’t meet Spike’s gaze.

The intruder who called himself Felix Walken didn’t seem to notice their movements and went on matter-of-factly. “I’m Chane Laforet’s fiancé.”

(Temporary Investigation Headquarters)

RRRRING-RRRRING-RRRRRIIIIIIIIIING-RRRRRING-RRRRRING-RRRRRIIIIIIIING ---

“...Would this be Donald?”

Victor was startled by this interruption, and hesitated for a moment. He then took a deep breath and tried to assume the role of a leader in control.

“Hello, Talbot speaking...I see, so it is Donald. What is it?”

Victor listened with a stern expression, but then it changed dramatically. “What...?” He turned and motioned for Edward to turn on the radio. Edward understood his gestures and rushed to switch it on. As he went through the stations, the live broadcast filtered into the old office.

[Around three hundred locations have been planted with explosives. The number of injured and deceased are still uncertain at this point, but along with the explosives, there have been over two hundred people reported missing not only in the city of Chicago but also the surrounding areas. The citizens of Illinois are extremely alarmed by these events.]

Victor stood, frozen in shock. Even Bill raised his head from the desk and rubbed his eyes.

“Why. didn’t. we. hear about this ahead of time??” Victor was teetering on the edge of exploding, and his shoulders quivered with rage. “I see. So that’s it. All right. All right, Donald. Report to the FBI headquarters and then call me back immediately.”

Victor lowered the phone slowly, trying and failing to prevent anger rising into his calm, haughty face. His hands rested on the phone as if with a little more force, he would crush it into splinters.

“It looks like Nebula has never considered us worthy of notice.”

His voice was eerily calm, but it seemed to have provoked Edward into a sudden, violent realization.

“They were a diversion! All of Huey Laforet’s operations in New York up till now were a smokescreen!”

Suddenly, the door opened with a bang and a man’s face poked into the office.

Victor didn’t recognize him. From his clothes, it looked like the Depression had made him a tramp. However, he looked alert and keen, so to the inspectors inside, it was an odd combination indeed.



Even average homeless people wouldn't visit their office. And although they hadn't posted a security guard outside, it was highly unlikely that someone would mistake this address for any other.

"Who are you?"

The man didn't seem to mind the obvious mess that the inspectors were in, and spoke with unexpected poise and politeness.

"Greetings for our first meeting. Or rather, our first meeting in a long while. Well, Officers...are there really only three of you?"

"...!? What do you want?"

"Seeing as you are surprised by the broadcast, I came to deliver a message from Master Huey."

"!?" Dread filled the three men.

"Master Huey would like to tell you: 'I am sorry that the turn of events will cause difficulties for you, Victor.'"

A messenger from Huey! Considering everything that had just happened, there was no way that this man was joking.

Since Victor and his team had been preoccupied with how Huey was contacting his subordinates, this was a perfect opportunity to find out. However, alarm bells filled Victor's head. Why now of all times?

"Is that so... We don't know the whole story, but please stand right where you are and don't move."

Victor's gaze could have sent ice down anyone's spine, but the strange man only smiled slightly.

"Master Huey has this to tell you: 'I am sorry for the trouble, however I cannot allow you to interfere between me and Nebula. Therefore, please desist.'"

As he finished, something dropped to his feet with a clang.

It was a copper-coloured rod, and at one end was a thin string. From the string came smoke and crackling sounds.

Victor immediately turned and yelled at his men. "On the floor!"

Bill and Edward dived behind their desks.

"Oh, you sly bastards..."

The man didn't seem to want to escape, and the bomb detonated at his feet.

The office was engulfed in roaring flames.



第四章表

外に思いを馳せてみよう

## Chapter 4 - Part 1 : Think About the Outside World

("Broadway," Alcatraz. Night time)

"Hey hey hey, you there."

In the evening on the day that Ladd was sent to the Dungeons, Firo was awakened by his neighbour.

Firo didn't have anything to do, so he had turned off his light earlier, earlier than lights out, pulled the blanket over himself and went to sleep. He now woke, groggy, to the excited greeting from next door.

"...Dragon, right?"

"Yup. So what was going on this morning? With our bro?"

"Mmmm....Oh...you mean with Ladd?"

"What a toughguy. First time I saw a hit like that. Man."

"Yawn...but Jack Dempsey's even better." Firo just gave any odd answer for the sake of an answer, but he couldn't help recalling the dreamlike events of this morning. He really hoped that he'd wake up to find that everything from first coming to this prison had been a dream, but reality refused to cooperate with his wishes.

"Man...it was mind-boggling...not just his strength, but he actually went for that elephant." Dragon seemed to get more and more excited. "He's so tough. His left arm's fake, right? Hey, maybe he fought a man-eating bear and sacrificed his arm for victory, or maybe he was on a deserted island and his arm got eaten by crocodiles...heehee. I bet it was delicious." Firo heard lip-smacking sounds from next door.

"So, I wonder which Peter Pan got his hand." He thought that his joke was a bit lame, but it might get something out of Dragon. "I guess you'd be pretty familiar with the tale of Peter Pan, right?"

Peter Pan came from a very popular British novel, a novel which was also published in the United States.

Before, Firo had read the novel after Claire finished with it.

--- a teenager forever...Claire really wished that could be true. Whereas Firo himself couldn't wait to grow up and become stronger. As he thought this, Firo let out a bitter smile. Perhaps Czes was Peter Pan.

Then he realized that his neighbour hadn't answered him. "? What's up"

"Oh...nothing. Actually, I used that book to learn English before."

"Oh really. Then that means your English should be really good."

"Yeah, not bad I guess, 'cuz I didn't live with the other immigrants."

--- Heh. Firo didn't really believe him. During meals, Dragon always chatted fluently with the other Asians. He was just about to question Dragon when footsteps echoed through Broadway.

This sound, bouncing between the iron-barred doors, was like a death knell.

Firo immediately went back to bed and buried himself in his blankets, waiting for the footsteps to fade. However –

They stopped right outside Firo's door.

"Hey, you in there. What are you hiding?"

--- Huh?

He couldn't deny it. The voice was talking to him.

Firo had no experience with this kind of thing, so his instinct was to snuggle deeper into his blankets and wait for further developments. But then his door creaked open. The sound made Firo stick his head out.

The warden who showed up was young. Without any warning, he immediately went over to Firo and yanked his blanket aside.

"Hey, what is this?" Firo scrambled to stand up.

The warden's voice was icy. "That's exactly what we wanted to ask you." And he opened his hand to show Firo a small, shiny knife. It was a small knife that could be concealed in one hand, and it seemed to release a faint scent of brand new metal.

"...huh?" Of course Firo had never seen it before.

But the guard smiled a little at Firo and grabbed his wrist. "This is a warning in case you ever plan to do something like this again."

Firo was dragged from his cell, utterly confused and still groggy. He wanted to do something to test that he wasn't dreaming, but the cold steel of the handcuffs cruelly reminded him that this was reality.

He looked around as he was pulled along and realized that the other inmates were all staring his way.

The warden also realized that Firo was awake and understood his predicament now. He waved the knife at Firo. "So then. Why don't you give me a good explanation for how you got this in here?"

"...you're getting some time to think hard about it in the Dungeons."

They went down a set of stairs, through a heavily guarded gate, and into a long passageway.

Although they had passed many wardens and guards at that gate, only Firo and the guard with the knife went through the gate. As the gate shut behind them, Firo spoke up quietly. "So, I guess you're working under Missouri, right?"

The guard didn't even turn. "I guess I'm spared from having to explain then." His voice was cool.

"Couldn't you wait a few days? I just arrived."

"It's because of an urgent matter." The warden was expressionless, and Firo frowned.

"So what's this urgent matter then?"

"As a prisoner, you have no need to ask about what's going on outside prison."

--- Well, look who mentioned it in the first place.

Firo wanted to launch all of his protests at the warden, but then thought that it would do no good. He could only ignore the warden's bad attitude.

"So, what's the deal?"

"It seems that Huey has already discovered that you're here. In which case it's best to just let you meet him up front. If you have any questions for him, go ahead and ask. Because he's sure to have questions about you."

"Talk about messy tactics. Did that tool Missouri really give you this order?"

Firo was expecting the warden to snap and yell at him, but he only smiled and never broke stride. "Of course not."

"...huh?"

"Missouri is my superior, however he only asked me to bring you down to the Dungeons to question you about your future plans."

"....."

Firo felt dread descend upon him. It almost felt as if something was sitting in his stomach, a very corporeal sense of dread.

He remembered his boat trip to Alcatraz. It was a similar uncomfortable feeling, and even then he sensed that something untoward was going to happen.

"Ah, so you're Missouri's man and Huey's man at the same time?" Firo asked in despair.

The warden looked at the miserable Firo, smiled, and nodded. "It's nice to talk to someone so savvy."

They were under the prison basement now. Ahead was a door concealed in darkness, and then there were tiled stairs. Ahead was further into the inner sanctum, under underground.

In this place was a room.

As Firo went further down into the underbelly of the prison, he fancied that he was also going deeper and deeper into the prison's history. However, when they reached the final level, this sentimental thought evaporated.

It was just a space sealed off by cold metal and concrete and three sets of security gates.

Although the space between each set of gates was only one metre wide, each gate was still securely locked.

After the three gates was another passageway, and at the end of the passageway was another gate. This gate was slightly different from the last three – it had a window. There was also a flap for delivering food.

--- ...so that's why they needed those gates. To completely seal him off.

Although immortals couldn't turn their bodies into jelly, it might be possible to squeeze oneself through a small opening such as the flap if the immortal didn't mind the pain. Perhaps even the air ducts had three layers of security somewhere inside.

Why not just cut off oxygen for the length of his imprisonment? This cruel punishment surfaced in Firo's mind. It would be like sealing an immortal in a barrel and then sinking him into the river bottom to die over and over again. Then another thought occurred to Firo – compared with that, Victor's way of dealing with Huey made him seem positively benevolent. He grimaced.

--- So even though there are traitors and double agents among the wardens, it really doesn't amount to much.

The warden seemed to have guessed what Firo was thinking and let out a sarcastic smile. "The guard who greeted you at the docks was sent off to the mainland. He won't come clean, of course, and we can't interrogate him, so we can only watch him."

"I see...if I report you, I guess you'd just meet the same fate."

The warden was unperturbed by such feeble threats. "That's right. If you report me, another will simply take my place."

"...Okay...so how do you think we should proceed with this little manoeuvre? If you give me some hints, maybe I can leave this place behind me by tomorrow."

"How about you ask Master Huey that? Maybe he'd tell you." The guard was still smiling. "And don't think prison break is so easy. Even if there are traitors like me here you saw all those guards back there."

"...that's true."

There might be an escape from this special holding area, but the way towards the surface was full of dangers. And Firo had heard that the Chief Warden had a certain flair for his life's work. Although it would be difficult to say whether even half of the wardens were still under his command, because of the Chief Warden's reputation, breaking out of here would still be a difficult thing to do.

"However...ah, I think you'd be released soon."

"...from the prison?"

"Well, it wouldn't be too hard for Master Huey."

--- Hey hey, wait a sec.



Although Firo had only been on this island for two days, he was already chafing under the strict wardens. He might be an immortal, and the choppy waters of the bay might not have sharks, but even so he doubted whether he could swim his way to San Francisco. Escape was impossible.

But Firo's "wait a sec" had nothing to do with the possibilities of escape.

If Huey escaped, what would happen to Firo himself?

He was here to learn how Huey was directing his subordinates from inside prison. If Huey escaped before he got this information, perhaps Firo would be hauled back to finish Huey's sentence for him. For the rest of his life.

This idea filled Firo with disgust, and the nasty feeling in his stomach threatened to rear up.

He was too preoccupied to realize that he and the warden had already arrived at the last gate. His task accomplished, the warden took a step back and motioned for Firo to go in.

"Hey, you aren't planning to clap your right hand over my head the moment I step through that door, are you?"

"If that's what I was planning, I might as well have really locked you in the Dungeons and given you your last meal laced with sedatives."

Firo took one last look at the sarcastic warden, and pushed open the door with a long face.

He didn't let down his guard. As the door opened wider, he saw one lone man sitting in the center of the room, and felt slightly safer. But then, as the door opened fully –

"Oh hey, Firo! So you were called down here too eh?"

"What –"

--- Isaac?

Firo felt a shiver pass through him and jumped back towards the doorway.

Suddenly, a hand flew out from the shadow behind the door, right for where Firo had been standing a moment ago.

".....!"

Firo took a deep breath and readied himself to act.

An enemy – it must be an enemy.

However, in the second that Firo took in the scene before him, the tense atmosphere seemed to have eased a little.

The hand from the shadows – Firo realized that it was a left hand.

Another moment later, the other hand also reached out from the shadows. The two hands began to clap slowly.

“As they say. Very beautifully done. Your judgement and your reactions aren’t bad at all...perhaps even comparable to Ronnie and Denkuro.” The first half seemed like praise, the second seemed like the man was just thinking aloud to himself.

The man emerged from the shadows. His uniform was different from those that Firo had been issued; they were completely white.

“Hello, Firo Prochainezo. And so we meet for the first time. Or, if going by your memories, perhaps it should be ‘long time no see.’”

His voice and tone seemed utterly alien to his surroundings, and he looked at Firo with a light smile on his face.

Firo matched the face of the man before him with the memories of the alchemist deep in his mind, and slowly relaxed.

“Well, I’d like to say ‘goodbye’ to you as soon as possible, Huey Laforet.”

“Ah, so you wanted to ask something?”

It was only thirty seconds after they had met.

Firo had cautiously walked into the room on Huey’s invitation, looking all around. However, there didn’t seem to be anything out of the ordinary. It was more spacious than his own cell, but otherwise they were the same.

Huey stood at one end of the room and Firo stood with Isaac on the other.

Firo didn’t bother to hide his unpleasant feelings. “All right, let’s hear it. What use does someone like you – practically all-knowing demigod– for an ordinary fellow like me?”

“Ah, you want to ask why Isaac is here, correct?”

Firo shot Huey a murderous look and Huey just smiled.

It was hard to say what bothered Firo about Huey. He didn’t get the sense that Huey was a liar or an evil man, but something made him uncomfortable. If he really had to give an example, he could draw any number of things from how Huey greeted him just now, but it wasn’t small details like that. Whatever it was, the instincts that Firo honed as a part of the Camorra told him to keep his distance from this man.

The air between Firo and Huey was charged with a peculiar kind of electricity. The guard stood waiting outside, and the only thing between them was Isaac. Isaac seemed completely oblivious to the tension, and only perked up when his name was mentioned.

“Hey what? Me? What about me?”

Firo stopped talking to Huey and turned to Isaac instead, hoping to have a change from the tense mood. “I was saying, how come you’re here?”

“Oh, me? I was called down by the guard and then chatted some with this fairy master there.”

“...Fairy?”

Huey was an immortal and not really human, so from a certain point of view Isaac wasn't entirely wrong, but why would he choose this word?

Firo was just about to ask, but Isaac seemed extremely smug and continued with his outrageous ideas. “Did you know that in Japan the beings who reside in one place like this are called zashiki-warashi? House spirits, you know? And if you upset them then terrible fortune will come to you! If you meet them on the road, you have to put your shoes on your head and drop to the ground! There's been evidence for this kind of thing, so you be careful, Firo!”

Firo felt the veins at his temples pop. “...Oh, get real...it might be a good change that Miria isn't echoing everything you say, but how come you're even more far gone?”

In contrast, Huey took a step forwards and smiled at Isaac. “Thank you for today, Isaac. Very fascinating, everything about you...I have some private matters to discuss with Firo now, so I'm afraid our meeting is at an end for today.”

An expression of disappointment crossed Isaac's face, but then he smoothed it over with a happy smile. “Is that so! Well, I hope you bring joy to everyone here! I always felt as if everyone here was unhappy – I suppose everyone has their troubles.”

“Yes, it would be grand if everyone could lead happy and satisfied lives. Ah, please keep this a secret – or else the happiness might escape.”

“All right! Trust me! I'm great at keeping secrets!

--- is that so...then how did you end up here? Firo thought. But he didn't see how he could pursue this question, so kept his mouth shut.

Isaac couldn't tell what Firo was thinking, so he got up cheerfully from his chair. Huey saw him out, smiling, until Isaac was taken away by the warden. Firo thought that Isaac would probably stay in the Dungeons overnight and just be quietly brought back to his cell the next morning like nothing happened.

Behind him, the door closed. Firo turned to again study the man before him.

His smile had more ice to it than when he was looking at Isaac. He pointed to the chair in the centre of the room. “Please have a seat.”

“You can sit.”

“I accept your generous offer.”

“.....”

Without any more token courtesy, Huey sat himself down. Firo felt even more put out – Huey wouldn't be easy to deal with. To compose himself, Firo took a deep breath. At the same time, Huey started to speak.

“Apologies for before. Even I want to play pranks like a child.”

Firo understood that he meant hiding behind the door and thrusting out his left hand as Firo entered, and made sure that his face was expressionless. "...Doesn't matter. I got the same from Victor."

"Ah, I see. Well, that is indeed like Victor. But tell me, if it doesn't matter, why are you looking at me so accusingly?"

"...Did you want something? If not then can I leave?" Leaving would probably cause more problems for Firo in the future, but he really did want to get out. Huey didn't say anything, and to fill in the silence, Firo spoke again. "So why did you call Isaac down here too?"

"Ah, that's because I heard that he was an immortal too...and I wanted to have a chat, that's all. What an interesting person. He fascinates me."

"Did you call me down for the same reason?"

"Of course, that is part of it..." Huey sat silent for a moment with his shoulders hunched. "Well, I have some matters to ask you. Victor aside, don't you have some questions for me?"

"...You should have said so earlier. Well, it's nothing I want to ask you now, really, but some stuff I need to say."

Firo stood with his back to the wall and crossed his arms. "All right, listen up. I don't really give a damn about what you're planning to do, and I don't want to devour you either. Maiza doesn't have anything against you in particular. If you want to make yourself an enemy of the state, or if you want to take over the world, fine, as long as you don't bother us and our own little business, be my guest. So don't drag us into it. I'm already pissed enough about having to come to this hellhole."

"I see...you must really be fond of Ennis."

Firo's eyes flashed. "That's none of your business."

Huey's voice was still light and composed. "Hmm...it seems that one of my subordinates was rather discourteous last year. I believe Christopher and his associates had some ill intentions towards Ennis."

"So you know it too."

"And I don't believe it is necessary to involve Ennis either." Creak. Huey shifted in his chair and the cold smile on his face became colder. "...as long as you are willing to cooperate."

"Cooperate?"

"Szilard Quates's memories and your existence are of the utmost importance, you know."

"....."

Firo frowned. Huey might have only somehow deduced that he had devoured Szilard, but Firo felt that he couldn't underestimate Huey's scope of influence.

"I don't really get it. They don't seem that important to me at all, that stuff."

"No, no. They are important – the lore of how to create Ennis, the incomplete knowledge regarding the elixir of immortality. Very important."

“.....”

Huey smiled at Firo. “And I am also interested in you yourself. ...I have never had the experience of devouring another immortal. Szilard, on the other hand, devoured many people in his lifetime, perhaps even dozens. Whether something has changed inside you as a result of devouring Szilard, or if nothing has changed...your past, your present, your future, they all deeply intrigue me.”

Firo was furious. “Shut up, you nutcase. I am still who I am.”

“...so you have never doubted yourself?”

Firo had no retort to that. Truth be told, he had. Huey smiled again at Firo’s obvious distress and continued.

“What you took from Szilard is not just knowledge about facts and figures. I do not know whether you have done such an experiment, but suppose you want to drive a car, all you have to do is draw out Szilard’s memories and your body would begin to move on its own.”

“.....”

Huey’s almost detached voice continued. “As such knowledge and memories filter slowly into your being, can you say that you remain yourself? Can you tell whether you are different from the self before you devoured Szilard? Have you never had a hint of suspicion about who you are now?”

He wasn’t threatening Firo, nor was he trying to convince Firo; he just seemed to be asking innocent questions. His expression was calm and composed as he spoke, as if he wanted to encourage Firo to also look at these questions as objective scholarly interest.

But Firo felt that there was something behind his calm face that was discomfiting. He shivered.

“So...what are you going to do?” Firo couldn’t help himself.

Huey considered for a moment. “Ah, yes...my ultimate goal is to create a ‘demon.’ You could say, perhaps, that it has been my goal from the very beginning, but...” Huey sounded like he was talking to himself, and seemed unable to express his thoughts without repeated self-correction. He was silent for a while, and when he looked in Firo’s direction again, his words had a hint of doubt.

“In the future...my future...I would really like to know.”

“The future...”

“I just want to understand.”

His words were incomprehensible to Firo. “What?”

“Exactly, ‘what.’ All ‘what’s. It doesn’t matter what the subject is.”

Huey shifted and sat up straighter and began a long monologue that seemed directed at both Firo and himself. “Why were we born? What is the meaning of our existence? Why do we kill one another? Don’t you think that there ought to be people who ask such questions once in a while, even though the questions seem irrelevant? When I was young, I thought of myself as a philosopher, and pondered these questions as well – however, I grew quickly tired of them. Not because there were no answers, but because there were too many. I could obtain many answers myself, fudge my way through them and have an illusion of understanding, but I didn’t have any interest in doing that.

Even if I knew that I held the answers somewhere in my heart, I wouldn't feel regret at never accessing them. But...I want to know what other people think, be they philosophers or innocent little children, evil people, good people, fools and prophets, each person will come up with their own little answers. And for questions such as the meaning of life and the truth about the world, each person only can hold their own interpretation and conclusions – I simply want to know...all. I simply want to understand it in all of its totality.”

“...totality?”

“The ones living today, in the past, in the future. Or, in another words, whether they are living matters little, but anyone who has ever existed. I want to understand their inner being. That is just one aspect. Other than human matters, where are the boundaries of the universe? Does the smallest component of matter take the form of a dot or a line? Can we turn back time, and do other dimensions exist? Grand questions like these that have nothing to do with our daily lives, more humble questions relevant to our survival, such the truth behind crimes. Who is Jack the Ripper? What's the true face of Ice Pick Thompson, the killer who shook New York? How long does it take to cook white fish? Do superhuman abilities exist? What is at the foot of the rainbow? Even such question...yes, everything, in all of its totality.”

Huey was sitting still in a purely white uniform, but in his melodious voice was a hint of enthusiasm and madness.

“Suppose I do find out everything I want to know, what then? Perhaps I will be bored, or perhaps all the knowledge would destroy my mind. Or perhaps these discoveries will lead to new questions. I just want to know.”

“...well, what's the point? Knowing all these things?”

“Perhaps there's no point, or perhaps a point will manifest once I obtain all of this knowledge. Everything now is hidden in utter darkness. To know everything is the meaning of my existence. If the world does not let me live in this way, then the world must be destroyed.”

“Okay, in another words, you wouldn't mind destroying the world to find out more about it?”

“To get answers, it's the only way.”

--- He's insane.

Firo stared at the man before him. Talk about overboard. He must really leave as soon as possible –

“.....haha...”

Huey was also watching Firo in return, and began laughing at his expression. “Hahahahaha! Ahahahaha!”

“.....?”

--- He must be completely whacked out.

But then Huey stopped laughing and gave a childlike smile and shrugged. “I was just kidding you.”

“...huh?”



Firo was open-mouthed with confusion, but Huey went back to his cold and composed state. “Were you really thinking that all my efforts have been motivated by such a nihilistic attitude? Don’t worry. Wanting to destroy the world and such things are just foolish ideas of my youth.”

“Huh?”

Huey ignored Firo’s confusion. “Ah, people who don’t know me might think I’m quite mysterious. I just wanted to see whether you would have the same response. Don’t worry – you can forget everything we just said.”

It slowly dawned on Firo that he was being toyed with. He felt both furious and embarrassed, but also felt a little less in danger. All these feelings thudded in his chest.

“You...you’re really a piece of work.”

“Well, didn’t I say even I like to play childish pranks sometimes?”

“.....”

Firo felt all his muscles tense.

--- If I rush over and act now I’d be finished. If I rush over I’d lose.

He tried his best to compose himself. “I bet all the other alchemists found you annoying too.”

“I only had one friend.”

“Well, he must be really nice, a saint. Or else he’s a complete idiot, or a masochist.”

“No, he’s quite an evil man, and insane.” Huey seemed to be talking to himself again, and stared into space. When he spoke again, his voice seemed lonely, as if he missed someone who wasn’t there. “He is utterly and irrevocably insane. He’s always thinking, what would happen if the world was happy? He tries, very conscientiously, to make everyone happy, regardless of their ideas, religion, social background, whether they are good people or bad people.”

“...strange guy indeed. But I think I’d still get along with him better than I get along with you.”

From Szilard’s memories came the face of an unknown alchemist, but because it had nothing to do with Firo’s present situation, Firo banished it from his thoughts.

After a short silence, Huey seemed to have come back to the present as well, and got up slowly from his chair.

“Well, in the end, I would like your cooperation. If you have questions for me, you’re welcome to ask. If you ever want to give Szilard’s memories away in exchange for something you want, I promise you that I would try my best to pay the price you ask.”

“.....”

“In this way, there is no need for me to involve Ennis, so it’s a win-win situation for both of us. I can also direct Christopher away from Ennis.”

This was the first time during the conversation where Huey put forth a concrete proposal. Firo thought for a moment and asked Huey how long he had to consider.

“I plan on staying here for a few more days. I will call you down one more time, and I would be grateful if you could tell me your answer then.”

This must mean that Huey was going to break out of Alcatraz in a few days, and Firo wasn't the least bit surprised.

“If you accept my offer at that time, I will offer my method of communicating with my subordinates and my methods of turning over the guards to you as a kind of deposit. Isn't that what Victor wanted?”

He seemed to know everything like the back of his own hand. Firo's new questions were in a turmoil inside his mind, and only one came out.

“...Who the hell are you, really...”

It was a simple question, but Huey still adopted a thoughtful pose with a finger at the corner of his lips. After a few seconds, he smiled.

“Ah, I'm just a researcher. But I don't think Victor and that Senator can quite appreciate this fact.”

Firo didn't know when the warden had showed up outside the door, but he was taken away as his conversation with Huey came to an end.

The voice of a little girl came from the bed in the corner.

“Papa, you must be tired!”

“Ah, thank you, Leeza. How are things over there?”

“Oh, we had quite a powerful character causing some trouble for us! He has this humungous wrench, and he's kinda mental! But really powerful, and the Lamia were at a loss how to deal with him...but it's okay now! We understand him clearly now, so everything's okay! 'Cuz we got a hostage, so it'll wrap up soon.”

“Is that so? Fantastic.” Huey was smiling softly at her, but then noticed that she seemed to have a different expression than usual.

“...? What's wrong?”

“This is the first time I saw Papa so merry! Papa looked so so happy when he was talking to those Isaac and Firo people!”

Huey smiled even more at the girl's undisguised surprise and jealousy. “Ah, Leeza. You wouldn't happen to be jealous to see me so happy with people I just met, would you?”

“Uh-huh! Very jealous! I think it'll be great if they died. But I can't kill them, can I?”

“Oh, no, of course not! And they are immortals too, so Leeza won't be able to kill them.”

For a while, Leeza seemed to be vexed by Huey's answer and lowered her head in thought. Then she raised her head.



“But but~~...I think today Papa isn’t like how he is usually,” she said.

Huey sensed that she was still a little unsettled by his behaviour that day. “My talk with Isaac... reminded me of long ago.”

His old friend, and his old self.

“He’s...they’re very similar....their personalities, their strange ideas...yes, similar...”



第四章裏

相談しよう、そうしよう



## Chapter 4 - Part 2 : Let's Discuss This - Okay It's Settled

(Madison Square Garden)

“How could you make Chane cry?”

The men decked out in black surrounded a girl dressed in a black evening dress and a young man with red hair.

Even though the situation had been tense, the young man seemed to exude an extremely leisurely air. “I will definitely beat the crap out of you lot to make up for the psychological damage you did to Chane.”

“Huh? What are you talking about? She ain’t crying!”

The young man just shook his head sadly at Spike’s apparent confusion. “Can’t you hear it? Such tragic weeping...weeping for help. Well, technically, only I can hear it.”

“What the hell is with you? You O.D.ed on drugs?”

“Come on, don’t be crude. I wouldn’t touch that stuff. It’s because I have confidence, so my heart and Chane’s are connected. So I can hear her.”

“Hey, ex-Felix, you really sold your name to this dope here? He – what? He’s an assassin too?”

The former Felix just gave a heavy sigh at Spike’s blundering deduction. Meanwhile, the young man began staring intently at Spike’s face.

“Oh, I remember now.”

“...?”

The alarm bells in Spike’s head went up another notch. Confused, he strained to hear what the young man was saying. “You’re the gunman on the train.”

The alarm bells in Spike’s head erupted. He had thought that his numbers gave his side superiority, but this belief completely disintegrated.

It couldn’t be so simple.

“Huh...as I recall, I had you wiping the train tracks with your face. Can’t believe you survived.”

(Temporary Investigation Headquarters, New York)

The office was in even greater havoc than the park.

It was a good thing that fires didn’t start, but smoke still rolled from the office interior. Inside, a few shadows coughed and stood up shakily.

Although Victor was knocked back by the blast, he was still conscious.



“Dammit. Is everyone all right?”

He looked around him. Although the things on the desks had been blown to smithereens, the table itself seemed unharmed.

His two subordinates crawled out from under the table. “Fine. No injuries, as far as I could tell.”

“What happened?”

Victor breathed a sigh of relief. “Neither of you are hurt. That’s wonderful.”

“Um...”

“.....”

“What? What is it with you two?” Victor looked at them with an exasperated expression.

The reply was impudent. “Oh, just that it’s the first time you expressed any concern about us whatsoever.”

“Yeah...I’ve been on your team for so many years and this is the first time I felt touched. Please, I ask permission to cry.”

“You...you...” Victor was red in the face and clenching his teeth in indignation. But then he sorted out his priorities, collected himself, and went towards the source of the blast.

“To threaten us with a bomb...did he think that was sufficient? Did that man get away?”

The place where the strange man was standing was empty. Victor thought that he must have run away right before the bomb went off.

But the moment he reached the conclusion, he heard Bill’s would-be calm voice behind him. “Ah... no. I think he’s proved his threat quite thoroughly.”

“What happened?” Victor turned to see Bill staring at something outside the window. Their office was on the ground floor, so they could see a view of the whole street. Victor followed Bill’s gaze to see –

The man hadn’t run away. He appeared to have been blown backwards by the bomb, and lay on the pavement, covered with blood. His limbs were bent into impossible angles and his head was oddly twisted. He lay absolutely still. From the amount of blood, the chances that he was still breathing were very small.

What was even worse was that ten or so civilian bystanders had heard the explosion and crowded in to see what was going on. They were all staring at Victor’s face, which he had stuck out the window.

The sound of hooves from the mounted police patrol came from the distance, and Victor felt a blood vessel in his head burst. Luckily, as an immortal, it healed quickly and didn’t cause any lasting damage.

He stared back at the barely recognizable mass of flesh on the street and clenched his teeth.

“Not bad, Huey Laforet...it looks like I should have devoured you when I arrested you...”

(Genoard Mansion, Millionaire Row)

“Waaaaaaa.....aaaaaaahhhhh...Mr. Gr—Graham...”

“See here Jacuzzi, stop crying. I’m sure Graham is okay.”

Jacuzzi had heard the news about Chicago on the radio and again fell into a state of half-crazed sorrow. Everyone racked their brains to think of another topic to distract Jacuzzi, but the news from the radio chased every other thought from their minds. They could only stand around with long faces. Only Nice still faced Jacuzzi with a smile.

“But...b-but Nice...three hundred! Three hundred! So many explosives...I’m s-scared... Chicago’s gonna be blown flat!”

“Don’t worry, three hundred bombs won’t level Chicago.”

Jacuzzi started and looked at Nice in askance. The smile on her face was almost divine. “Because there’s five hundred bombs stashed in my room alone.”

“Ahhhhhh!” Jacuzzi clapped his hands over his ears and started to shake his head violently. “Stop stop stop! Stop it with the scary stuff! Stop!”

This was the usual daily life with Jacuzzi, but then the doorbell rang through the mansion.

Diiing-dong.

The postman almost never came, and Jacuzzi’s friends also rarely showed up here. This was not the usual, especially at such a time. The gang looked at one another in puzzlement.

“Who could it be?”

“Whoever it is, it’s gonna interrupt Jacuzzi’s crying, so it must be a good thing.”

“But Jacuzzi’s crying is a magnet for bad stuff to happen.”

“Oh, Jacuzzi, there you go again...”

“Stop right now!”

“Just stop crying!”

“You’re upset, I know, but think of the tons of people who are more upset than you!”

Jacuzzi hiccupped in surprise and indignation that all of his companions had rounded on him.

“Huh? Why are you all blaming me?” He rubbed his eyes and looked at the door. “N-not a good time, but I don’t want to be impolite.”

Jacuzzi opened the door and looked out with red puffy eyes.

“Hey, long time no see.”

On the doorstep was a bald and tattooed man with glasses.

“Great! You’re all right! That’s great!”

There was also a woman.

The man was Tim, and the demure woman with a rod-shaped object – Adele.

Both were friends of Jacuzzi's. A year before, Jacuzzi was dragged into the Mist Wall incident because of them, but now, Jacuzzi seemed to have completely forgotten the trouble that they had caused and seemed only to be glad that they were all unharmed.

"Adele, your wounds healed! That's fantastic!"

Adele, who was hiding behind Tim, was flustered by Jacuzzi's attention. "Um...I....that is..."

"? D-did I say something wrong again?" Jacuzzi looked like he was going to start crying again, and was looking at Tim like a lost puppy. Tim only sighed and looked back at Jacuzzi with both exasperation and wonder.

"You're...you're really an amazing guy, Jacuzzi. You show so much concern over someone who tried to kill you."

"Huh...? Oh..."

Jacuzzi paled as he looked at Adele again, but then he smiled and said, "B-but you see, it was all a big mess then wasn't it? And...it's not like we haven't killed anyone either...so..."

There was a short silence as Jacuzzi finished, but then he turned back to Tim and Adele.

"So...what brings you here now?"

Tim seemed to have long prepared an answer. "This Graham Specter character – you know him?" There wasn't any emotion in his voice to hint at what he might be thinking.

"Huh...?"

Of course Jacuzzi knew him – he was just crying over his possible demise.

Graham Specter –

Tim didn't give Jacuzzi time to wonder why he was asking about Graham, but just continued flatly to explain the organization he belonged to. "You've known about my organization for a while..."

Jacuzzi nodded. "It's directed by Chane's father, right?"

Tim looked like he didn't know how to continue. "Yes. Huey Laforet. According to his instructions, some of his subordinates have begun an operation in Chicago. It seems that they've had a run-in with this Graham."

"Graham...he....!?" Jacuzzi's voice went up a notch. His gang looked at one another.

"How, how – how is this possible? A run-in? What did they do to Graham!?"

"Hey, hey, settle down. It's the opposite, actually. They found that they couldn't actually do anything to Graham. They're at their wit's end now."

"Ah – huh?"

“And so, what the Lamia are thinking is that they need to find one of Graham’s friends and take them hostage...”

An unpleasant premonition surfaced.

Jacuzzi felt himself start to sweat and didn’t know why. He trembled and shook. “Um...I...I strongly strongly oppose this cruel and underhand plan...um...so...who’re they planning to take hostage?”

“Don’t you and your gang get along with him pretty well?”

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH so that’s why you –” Jacuzzi screamed and stumbled backwards. His gang rushed out of the mansion.

But Tim had his hands in the air to protest his innocence. He smiled wryly. “Calm down. Don’t worry. We, at least, never planned to drag you in this time.”

“Uh, r-really?” Jacuzzi wilted in relief, and a slight smile rose inside him. However, Tim’s next words made him nervous again.

“I can promise that we personally don’t plan on getting involved directly, but we’re not sure whether the Lamia have plans to target you.”

“Oh no!”

“Don’t worry. You have powerful friends, and I heard that Leeza’s already found an easier target. But we really have no idea how things will turn out. So be careful, and try not to get involved. The Twins will probably be around. We’re not certain, but you should be vigilant.”

Jacuzzi still looked extremely high-strung, but Tim had said what he needed to say, and turned to leave. “If the Twins are there, then maybe they’re traitors, because there has indeed been leaked information. Sham and Hilton, those are the name of the Twins.” With this last warning, Tim left the Genoard mansion behind him.

Adele looked at Jacuzzi, who was watching Tim depart with blank confusion on his face. “Um. Jacuzzi.....um....about before....I’m really, really....really sorry.”

Jacuzzi snapped out of it and began waving his hands and shaking his head. “Huh? Oh! Oh, um... it’s all right! Don’t mention it...”

Adele smiled slightly and prepared to follow Tim. As if she was compensating for what she did before, she said quietly, “The Twins...they lead a bizarre existence. Our one name for them really represents a multitude of identities...and so conversely, they really have many names.”

“Whether the Twins are strong or weak...it doesn’t matter...we...even that Felix monster... probably won’t be able to kill them....”

第五章表裏一体

刑務所を出よう！



## Chapter 5 : Let's Break Out!

("Broadway," Alcatraz. Night time.)

"What a day..."

It was after lights out, and Firo was curled up in his blanket, muttering to himself.

It was a few days after his meeting with Huey, and since then he had been quietly going through the motions of prison life.

Waking up each morning under the low, oppressive ceiling. Roll call six times a day. Meaningless, repetitive prison work. Strict rules.

It was all very tiresome, and Firo started developing a sense of sympathy for his fellow inmates.

Although he was in a single cell, ever since his first night there he had felt that his situation wasn't too unlike goods stashed aboard a slave ship. It wasn't a place he wanted to be in ever again.

The only times when he had a respite from all this was eating his meals with Isaac. Or during free times when he could go to the library to see a big Italian warden and listen to him talk about Naples, which was where Firo's father had come from.

Firo wanted to report the warden who was working under Huey, but he never got a chance to see Missouri. But then again, Missouri might think that it might be unseemly to single Firo out too often, so Firo could only lead his own bored existence and say nothing and do nothing.

Another day gone. Firo found that he was seized by paranoia every time he heard the sound of boots in the hallway.

He lay in bed, half asleep and muttering to himself. "Who sent them here? The three...?"

In cells such as these, his neighbours would be able to hear him talk, but Firo didn't worry about it, because he knew that the cells on either side of his were empty now.

Dragon had been sent down to the Dungeons. Firo had been there when Dragon was taken away, and the scene was deeply etched into Firo's mind. He was also sprayed with copious amounts of blood.

That afternoon, in the recreation yard.

Firo had seen the man with the protruding teeth who had called him "missie" on the day he had arrived, and was just wondering how he could take revenge, when the man gave a leer and muttered something to Dragon.

Dragon just grinned cheerfully and sidled closer to the man. For some reason, he leaned his mouth close to the other man's ear. Firo didn't know whether Dragon wanted to say something softly in reply, but as the man's leer got wider ---

"Huh? .....What....huh?"

A sudden agonizing pain. The man with the protruding teeth didn't know what was going on, and turned to stare at Dragon, perplexed. Dragon spat something in the man's face – his ear.



“AHHHHHHH!”

The man screamed at the sight of fresh blood and clamped his hand over his wound, but then Dragon bit down on the back of his hand.

The recreation yard was filled with more screams and more blood. The other inmates stared in horror as Dragon’s mouth worked around a piece of flesh. “Tasty tasty...kinda...but when I remember it’s from an old shrivelled dude then it tastes kinda disgusting.” He spat out the flesh, wiped the blood from the corner of his lips, and then headed towards Firo, smiling as if he did this everyday. “Ah, Firo, scared you, didn’t I? Sorry.”

“What are you...”

“This bastard was saying stuff like ‘So it’s true that Orientals are still runts after they grow up.’ What a lame joke.”

“Oh, I see.” Firo didn’t particularly express his surprise, but just shook his head.

Dragon was half joking, half serious. “I just want him to see what hell is like.” His bloody mouth stretched into a grin and he patted Firo on the shoulder. “Whatever. It actually doesn’t matter who it is.”

“...?”

Firo was just about to ask what this meant, but Dragon was seized by the wardens and taken away. The man with the protruding teeth was taken to the hospital and Dragon was sent to the Dungeons.

Firo was still pondering the bloody events of that afternoon.

It made sense that Dragon wasn’t back yet, and the big African American man, Gig, was also still away. Firo heard rumours that because Gig was disruptive and tried to fight the wardens, he would be locked away for another ten days.

And although he didn’t see it happen, the small Caucasian man was also sent to the Dungeons.

Apparently he was yelling something like “The big guy’s gonna get me!” and was planning to break out. When he heard the gunshots from the wardens, he freaked and passed out, and so was sent down to the last place he wanted to be, into the Dungeons and closer to Gig.

It was possible that Gig could really kill him down there, but the cells were isolated from each other by thick walls. And if anyone started a fight, it would probably be between Gig and Ladd.

So thus, the three people who arrived with Firo – and Ladd, the first person to act friendly towards Firo – were all sent down to the Dungeons.

Although being locked away was a just punishment for the things they did, Firo felt that there was something behind all this. If one of them was a special agent or something...what then?

As he drifted between these thoughts and sleep, the sound of boots echoed through Broadway for the Nth time that day. The footsteps and the sound of gunshots seemed designed to create a combination that crushed the inmates’ spirits.

Suddenly, the footsteps stopped. Only the sound of shots echoed in the distance.

“...you again?”

The warden's footsteps stopped at Firo's door, and he demanded that Firo open his door in the same haughty tone as before.

The same chilling creak of the door opening, the same unannounced yank at Firo's blankets.

Everything was the same as last time, and Firo woke. He opened his eyes slowly to see the same shiny dagger, the same warden's face.

The warden showed a sarcastic smile, but his words were still those of a warden. “Well, you're certainly going to be there for a while this time.”

(The Dungeons, Alcatraz.)

Ladd opened his eyes wide in the all-encompassing darkness and fiddled with the chains at his feet.

Clank clank clank, clank clank clank, clank clank clank, clank clank clank.

Other than sleeping, creating a racket with the chains was the only things confined inmates could do.

The grating, repetitive sound bounced back from the walls and created an echo in the utter darkness that would make inmates lose all hope, if not go mad.

Most other inmates couldn't stay in this place for a week before going insane, but Ladd had spent practically half of his sentence so far down here. Not only did he stay sane, but the other prisoners couldn't even detect any change in his spirits at all, and so they all admired him for it.

And most of the criminals, who had come through fire and brimstone themselves, came to this conclusion about him:

(He was crazy to begin with. His eyes never looked normal.)

Things that drove other inmates crazy like darkness, confinement, and loneliness never affected Ladd at all, because he had his own madness – perhaps nothing could take him any further.

“.....”

As usual, he was locked in the Dungeons and his feet were chained ---

But today, a cute voice spoke into the darkness.

[Hey.]

[.....]

[You're Ladd Russo, right?]

Clank clank clank, clank clank clank, clank clank clank. As Ladd continued to play with the chains, he realized that the voice was coming from the other side of the door.

[...You're the fairy that Isaac was going on about, right?] Clank.

[Fairy? Did big brother Isaac really say that? There's something wrong with his mind. He's so kiddish. Weird...]

The little girl's voice continued to echo in the cell.

Other inmates would have begun to suspect that they were going nuts at this point, but Ladd firmly believed that if the man he wanted to kill was in this prison, then anything was possible.

Now, as he heard the impossible voice of a little girl through the jangling at his feet – was he also hearing the door creak open?

Creeeeak, creeeeek, creeeeek.

And in front of Ladd there appeared a little hand clutching a lantern, glowing in the darkness.

“Does uncle Ladd have a friend called Graham Specter?”

Then the dark-haired and golden-eyed child appeared with an innocent smile on her face, and again her words were cruel in sharp contrast.

“‘Cuz we wanna kill him...and you're the hostage!”

“And...after that, you're gonna die too!”

“Oh, you're late.”

Deeper than even the Dungeons...

Firo was brought by the warden to face this man once more.

Huey was seated on the chair like last time, and when he saw Firo, he folded the newspaper that he had been reading.

“Our Chief Warden really is quite strict, whatever liberal ideas he might have. We rarely get things like newspapers and such, but after we co-opted Missouri, there has been a great deal more entertainment.”

Huey tossed the newspaper at Firo, and he saw the headlines about bombings and disappearances in Chicago. However, he didn't pay much attention to it, and just kept looking at Huey.

“So...what? Have you considered?”

“...on certain conditions.”

“Conditions?”

“My...whether it's my life or my past and my future, I've given it all to the Martillo family and Don Molsa Martillo. If you want a deal with the Martillos, I'll help broker it. But as I see it, I can't just act alone and sell off what I know to other people.”

Huey grunted at Firo's official words. “But you came to this island to protect Ennis. Wasn't that acting alone?”

“She’s my family,” Firo said matter-of-factly.

Huey’s expression did not change. “I see....well, I am interested in doing a deal with the Martillos, but given Maiza’s character...it would probably be rather difficult.”

“Is that what you’re worried about.”

“So, you don’t need intelligence from me any longer?”

“....well, I can just about guess it.” Firo grimaced and sorted through the memories of the alchemist within himself, and fished out a possibility. “Last year, your subordinate Christopher said something like, ‘We were made from the knowledge that Huey stole from Szilard’...”

“Oh, that blabbermouth.”

“And so, when I saw your warden, I remembered too. It can’t be that you –”

Just at this moment, just as Firo was going to confidently reveal Huey’s secret operations, a sound came from behind him.

Firo turned his head sharply on instinct, and saw that the warden who had brought him down here was lying on the floor. Another man was standing with one foot on his back.

At this scene, Huey’s expression was the same as ever. Nothing changed in his still face. His voice again sounded like he was just talking to himself. “Oh no, no...I wasn’t planning to call you down too...”

Then his lips turned up in a slight smile. “So, you must be the assassin from Nebula, correct? If the reports are true, your name is Felix Walken.”

The temperature of the room seemed to plummet. The small Caucasian man who arrived with Firo smiled a little ruefully.

“That name...I sold that off a long time ago. Right now I got no name.”

(Madison Square Garden, New York.)

A few days before.

“Argh....argh....Dammit....hold on....no...it can’t be!”

Spike finally understood why there were alarms going off in his mind and finally recalled the face of his opponent. He waved his canes at his men. “Retreat! Retreat!”

“Huh?”

This was puzzling, this sudden order to retreat. The men dressed in black stared at Spike in confusion – as far as they knew, they were facing only two opponents.

Spike seemed to have detected that his men were jittery, so he turned to run and continued to yell. “You idiots! Listen up! Retreat, I tell you! Run!”

Spike scampered away as if he wasn't blind at all, and even though his men were still filled with confusion, they followed him. Claire looked at them, stretched the muscles in his neck, and then ran after them.

"Hey, you really think I'd let you get away?"

Suddenly, he was pulled into the air.

The former Felix had materialized out of nowhere beside Claire, bent over, grabbed his feet, and stood up.

There was a sharp intake of breath from Chane. But Claire's predicament wasn't like hers a moment ago. Even though Claire was tumbling through the air, he managed to hook a finger into his opponent's mouth and forced the man to let him go. After that he simply righted himself and landed in front of him.

But as his feet touched the ground, the former Felix chopped away the hand at his mouth without batting an eyelash.

"...There's something I need to ask you," the former Felix said to the young man with red hair.

Claire looked at him intently in return. "Hey, you're pretty good." It wasn't a glare; rather, in the look was a kind of genuine admiration.

The former Felix narrowed his eyes. "You call yourself Felix Walken...where did you get this name?"

"Me? Oh, can't say in detail, sorry, but I bought it from a really hot thirty-year old dame."

The other man's eyes widened in surprise.

"Really...it's being passed along so quickly."

Then he turned to follow Spike, who was still agitated with terror. "All right. Well, I'll be back."

"Hey, wait..." Claire was going to stop him from going, but Chane had caught his wrist.

"Hmm? What's wrong, Chane? Are you all right?"

"....."

"Jacuzzi will worry, is that so? Ah...right. Okay, understood."

Chane's expression was very serious, and Claire decided to call it quits. He raised both his hands in surrender. But as he hovered at Chane's shoulder, he called to the departing men in black.

"Hey, tell your boss..."

"...what?"

"He'd better pick his opponents better, okay?"

The former Felix raised one hand in response. "...I'll pass that along."

Claire, the current Felix, was encouraged by this and decided to ask about another matter that he was concerned about.

“And also...who did you sell the Felix name to?”

The man paused at this as if nostalgic for his past, and raised his head to the sky.

“I sold it...not only to one person.”

“An Oriental man, a Black man, and a White man.”

(Huey’s cell, Alcatraz. A few days later.)

Then, others appeared behind the small Caucasian inmate.

The Asian man with the tattoos.

The African American man with the scars.

“Oh hey Firo, we meet again.” Dragon grinned at Firo and gave him a wink.

“Dragon...”

It appeared that the injuries that Ladd had inflicted on Gig hadn’t healed yet. He stood looking at Huey out of a grossly swollen face.

Huey squinted at the three men in understanding. “I see...so, this means that it’s all three of you.”

“Huh?”

Firo was still looking back and forth between Huey and the three men, utterly confused. The three of them didn’t seem to think anything of Firo being there, but just walked slowly into the room.

The small Caucasian man shrugged. “Well, there isn’t really a need for you to know, is there?” His demeanour was completely different from his previous one of a stuttering, cowardly inmate. Now there was a nasty smile on his face.

Huey thought about this for a while. “And added to the one who smuggled you in, it means there are four of you, right?”

“Sharp as you’re rumoured to be, I see.”

The small man clapped a signal, and another man entered the cell. He was a warden, but it wasn’t the one who brought them all to Alcatraz. In his hands was a rifle. This made the spacious cell seem suddenly rather cramped.

“Ah, the lead happens not to be a convict, but a warden.”

The four intruders faced Huey with varying expressions. Dragon smiled, snapped his teeth, and said, “Well, perhaps it’s just as you say –”

“Hey, hold on a sec.” Firo was so confused that it was feeling surreal. He faced Huey. “So who’re these guys?”



“Felix Walken – you must have heard this name.” Huey replied nonchalantly. His expression was still the same – Firo thought that perhaps it would be the same even if Huey was balanced on the line between life and death.

Then Huey said another familiar name.

“They’re all assassins hired by Nebula. I only knew the name the assassin would go by, but I never thought there would be four.”

“Then it looks like your intel’s full of holes,” Dragon threw out his chest proudly and grinned at Firo and Huey. “Lone wolf types seem to be in style now, but we’ve always been a four-man team. You can look us up if you’re in New York – ‘Jacks of All Trades’.”

“You’ve said too much,” the fake warden reprimanded his friend. Then he raised his rifle and pointed it at Firo and said coldly, “What I wonder is who this one is.”

“...I’m actually sort of confused, and I don’t know how best to explain it. Can you give me a moment?”

“Unfortunately not. We’ll figure out how to deal with you later – let’s do our job first.”

And so the four of them advanced, and step by step, and the distance between them and Huey shrunk. The small Caucasian man was an unknown quantity, but at least Dragon and Gig were seasoned fighters.

Huey’s expression was as calm as ever, but then he seemed to consider something and turned to Firo. “Fighting isn’t my strong point. Are you willing to help?”

Firo mimicked what the fake warden had said. “Unfortunately not.”

Huey looked as if he was expecting this answer, smiled, and then put his hands on his chair.

The expressions on the assassins’ faces tightened, partly because they couldn’t tell who would make the first move. Then this tense atmosphere was interrupted by a sound.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

The sound of footsteps.

The sound of footsteps echoed through the dark tunnel and into the cell.

When the assassins came into the cell, they had left the door half-closed, so they couldn’t see who was approaching. It was theoretically possible to see through the window, but since it was brightly lit inside and dark outside, it was also impossible.

Thump. Thump. Thump. It was rhythmic, like the ticking of a clock.

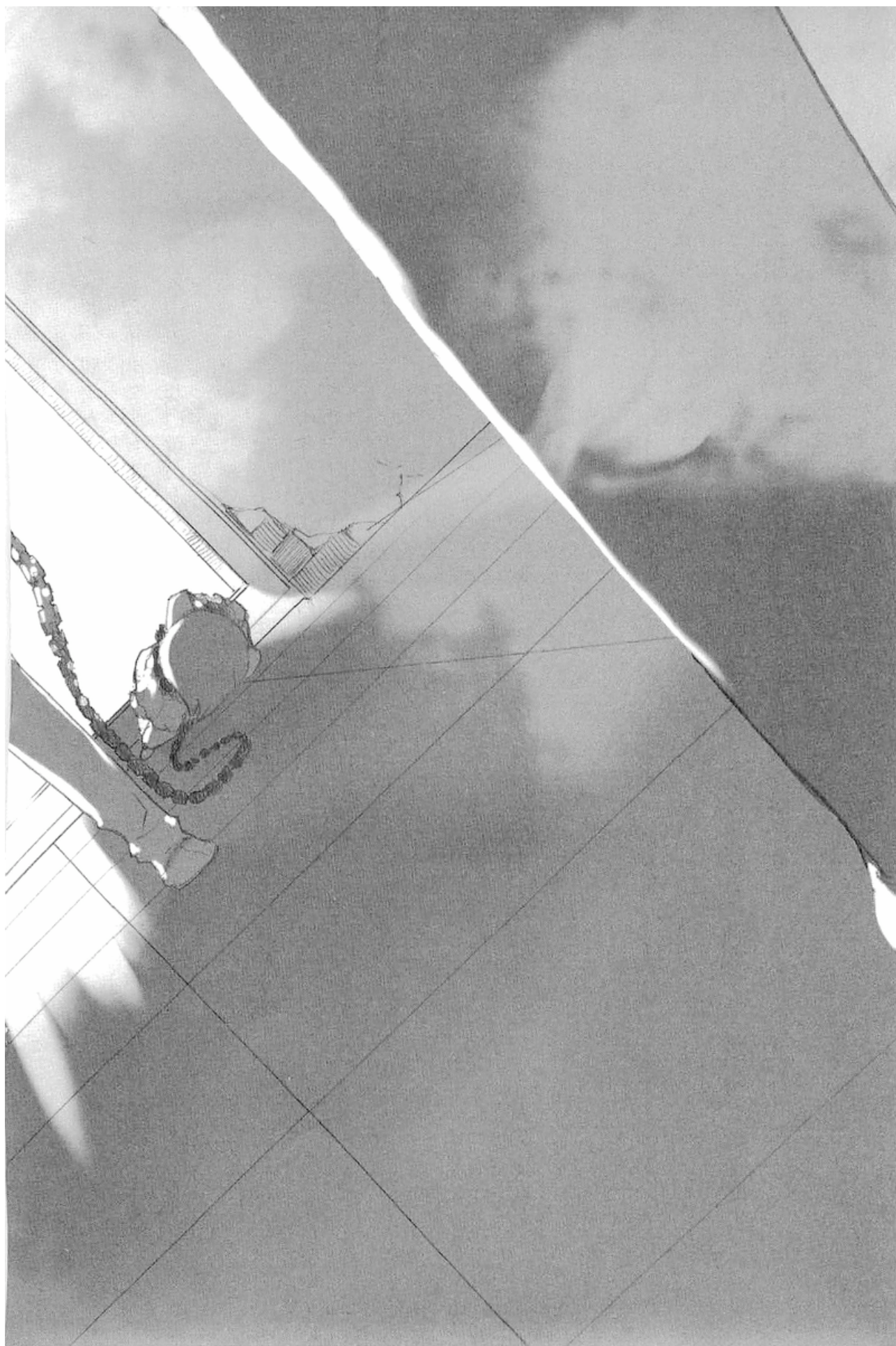
The chilling rhythm made the tense atmosphere even tenser. Everyone in the cell turned to look at the half-closed door.

And then, the footsteps stopped. Before each had time to draw a breath, a deafening crash reverberated through the room.

It was so loud that everyone felt their ears ring. But it wasn’t just the sound.







Along with the deafening sound of something smashing, everyone realized that the half-open door had been wrenched off its hinges and now stood off-kilter while its metallic parts clattered to the floor.

In a moment, they could see that in the doorway was –

“Good evening, Peter Pans! First hello to some, hello again to some, hello, you incarcerated Peter Pans! You eternal children!”

It was a madman who fit in more than anyone else, who was happier than anyone else, and whose smile was more twisted than anyone else’s.

In his twisted metal hand was a chain, and at the other end was a little girl, wrapped in chains from head to foot.

Huey couldn’t help starting at the sight. “Leeza…”

And thus, the crazed killer Ladd Russo picked out his target, Huey Laforet.

A smile appeared on his face as if he were falling in love at first sight, a mad smile of undisguised joy, and his maniacal voice filled the cell.

“The ticking crocodile’s got the Captain’s hook! And finally gets to open its jaws!”

(The Dungeons, a few minutes earlier)

“I dunno what’ll happen if I get too close, so I’ll take you as a hostage from right here~.”

The innocent little girl stood at the doorway of Ladd’s cell, beyond his reach, and seemed to pluck chakrams out of thin air.

The chakrams were shaped like doughnuts, with a hole in the middle. The girl fitted her hands through the holes and began spinning the disks.

The closer to the edges it got, the thinner the metal was. An observant person would be able to tell that these were actually edge weapons.

A very weak light filtered through the open door, but Ladd didn’t respond to the girl walking into his cell. He just kept on shaking the chains at his feet like a moment before. Clank clank clank clank clank.

“How does it feel being locked up?”

Clank clank clank. Ladd looked towards where the girl was standing.

“I can’t see very well because of the darkness, but you…”

“What?”

“‘I definitely won’t die.’ Your little fairy face definitely has that look.”

“...? Whatever. But I guess you’re right. You’re not in a position to kill me, but I’m going to kill you.”

The girl let out a peal of laughter, but Ladd continued to jangle his chains. “I have no idea what you’re planning to do to Graham – he’s never killed anyone. But I warn you, if we’re talking fighting, he’s more powerful than me, so watch out.”

Clank clank clank, clank clank clank.

“Know that already~. That’s why I’m taking you hostage.”

“But...I do kill.”

Clank clank clank.

“It doesn’t matter who, actually, but I’m gonna kill someone.”

Clank clank clank.

“Women, children, it doesn’t matter, as long as they piss me off...”

Clank...

And then the sound of the chains stopped.

Ladd had wrapped the chains around his hand, and before Leeza’s eyes, the other end of the chain rose into the air.

“Huh...?”

“...I’ll take them all out.”

Ladd stood up, his eyes glittering in the darkness, and the chains which wound around his right hand dropped to the floor.

At this moment, Leeza realized that situation wasn’t what she expected – it was seriously different.

--- the chains...aren’t locked to his feet.

That was her last thought before the chains whipped towards her and she lost consciousness.

The only sound remaining was the madman’s voice.

“Take them all out.”

(Huey’s cell, a few minutes later)

Firo thought that Ladd Russo’s arrival was totally sudden and totally random, and around him burned an aura of ferocity.

Ladd laughed and opened his arms, and threw the little girl’s body against the wall.

There was a thump as she hit the wall, and then rolled into the floor, coming to a rest at last, absolutely still. Whether she was alive or dead was unknown, but Ladd had already shifted his attention elsewhere.

“I pressed it,” he announced cheerfully to the tense room. His arms were extended outwards to his sides in a welcoming gesture. “But anyway.”

His prosthetic left hand hung limply from elbow to fingertips. But he didn't seem to mind, and still kept his arms stretched out. "Did you know everyone has a button in their heads? To kill or not to kill is determined simply by this button. Anyone can kill, but it just depends on whether they press the button. That's it. Don't you believe me?"

As Ladd ranted, he moved his hand to his temples and mimicked a pressing motion. “Click.”

Just this word, but over and over again, Ladd pressed his temple.

“Click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click  
click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click  
click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click click – you should  
keep pressing several times, twenty times, hundreds of times, thousands, millions, billions, of these  
buttons inside my body! Which means kill! Right-o.”

--- He's psycho.

This was Firo's thought as he looked at Ladd, and it seemed that this thought also occurred to the Felix Walkens. They didn't know what to make of Ladd. Only Huey looked at Ladd with interest, and Ladd didn't seem to like this attention. He shrugged his shoulders and took one more step into the cell, his eyes trained on Huey as he continued.

“Ah right, so, that’s just it – why don’t you die for the sake of those gazillion buttons? It’s okay, you just need to die once.”

Huey responded to this rant by sitting hunched in his chair and staring intently at Ladd's face, trying to see into him, see what kind of person he really was.

“...I suppose I can forgive your rude intrusion into my living quarters, but must you go on and on like this?”

“But a person who asks you nicely ahead of time, like ‘I’m going into your room now,’ wouldn’t be an assassin anymore.” Ladd’s voice became quiet. “Then he would be a utter madman.” But then his voice grew cheery again. “Ah, I’m finally warmed up! My body and my brain!” The atmosphere in the room shifted madly along with him.

He rotated his neck, crossed his fingers and stretched his arms. The sound of snapping joints filled the cell.

“So...so so so! How do you want to die? You got a body that will be killed over and over as you die over and over, so at least I’m giving you the choice. Come on, pick one before I pick one.”

Although there were others in the room, there was only Huey in Ladd's eyes, and Ladd made a beeline for his target.

The warden put his finger on the trigger. "Hey, you...what do you think you're doing...huh?"

But in the twinkling of an eye, Ladd had appeared right in his face.

Ladd had been walking towards Huey a moment ago, but he had changed his trajectory with amazing speed and approached the warden instead.



“Don’t butt in.” His voice made even the warden weak at the knees. “Alright, so you’re not blocking my way, but you’re butting into my line of sight. Your plans are butting in. Your voice. Your existence. Butting in way way way too much. Stop butting in, you asshole.”

Ladd’s words filled the warden’s eardrums, and in the next moment, a powerful pain filled his body.

His wrist.

Before he realized that he couldn’t feel his hand, he found himself staring down the muzzle of a rifle. The rifle he had been holding a moment ago.

“Oooo, your rifle’s a great gift, thanks.”

And the warden finally understood what happened. Ladd had wrenched the rifle from his hands.

Ladd didn’t even give the warden time to scream at his mutilated hand. “Now that I’ve thanked you, die!” He pulled the trigger.

The gunshot reverberated in the cell. Even Firo, who was used to this sound, cringed.

--- This guy...

At the same time, an unimaginable amount of blood splattered in all directions.

The trigger was pulled right in front of his face, but the warden was still conscious, and conscious that he had lost his right ear.

The warden made a half-turn with his body and then flopped, unconscious, down to the cold floor.

The reason he fainted wasn’t fear or pain; it was more direct. The bullet that whistled by his head blasted out his eardrums and sent such a violent shock through his brain that he passed out.

No one knew when he would wake. The three other assassins around him roused themselves and surrounded Ladd, each from a different direction.

Firo assessed the situation. They didn’t immediately pounce on Ladd, but took a step back. This way, they would have ample space to move.

Ladd exuded a strange aura. It was demonic, but in a way, also somehow pure and innocent. If words could materialize from thin air, eighty percent of the air in the cell wouldn’t be air any longer, but the word “KILL”.

Stranger still, Ladd was leaving himself open – but the feeling in the cell was that although Ladd could leave his back open to you, if you actually tried to make any moves, the rifle would immediately be pointed at your face.

Ladd was the only one who seemed relaxed in a room on edge. He gave a twisted laugh and prodded the fallen warden with his foot. “Ha! I was joking about dying, you rascals – just joking. I don’t really want to use up my energy on you. It would be a waste.”

He started to laugh, his face lifted towards the ceiling. Across from him was Dragon, and he had an uncertain smile on his face. “Hey you...what are you –”

“Okay, you shut it!” Ladd interrupted Dragon and aimed the rifle at him. “I get it. Even though I don’t know you, I get it. Don’t talk – shut up. Shut it, or I’ll have you kissing the ground too.”

“What...”

“Silence is golden, right? But I’ve seen your type in novels, musicals, and my own experiences too, many many times. Guys who keep flapping their traps and saying stuff like ‘You’re about to die so I’ll send you to hell with a gift’ or something, and leave themselves open to attack. The situation is still volatile, and anyone can gain the upper hand, but the worse the situation, the more these guys just seem to love jawing on and on. Well, to be honest, I guess I’m that type too! So, what’s the word, yeah, I don’t want to hear anything out of you, got it? I’ve already heard it millions of times, so shut it. Swallow the gift you were gonna send, and you can choke to death like a good boy.”

Dragon didn’t back down at this and instead showed his sharp teeth.

All through this, Firo’s eyes were wide with amazement, but Huey was still watching Ladd with a kind of mild interest.

Then, a deep voice boomed from the shadow behind Dragon.

“Dragon, let me deal with this one.” It was the huge African American, Gig.

“I didn’t give it my all last time. Not giving my all to an opponent is rude.” Gig lunged towards Ladd.

--- He’s fast.

Firo watched Gig and felt surprise overtake him. Gig had unimaginable speed, and swept towards Ladd like a gale.

--- He’s totally different from that time in the dining hall.

The big man was clearly adept at martial arts, and shot towards Ladd’s knees like a low cannon ball.

The rifle resting on the floor did not move.

Gig smiled, confident of victory. But then –

The rifle fell with a clatter to the floor.

“!?”

Gig saw Ladd take one graceful step back. In the next moment, Gig saw a fist coming towards his face.

By the time Gig realized that this was Ladd’s uppercut, the fist was already approaching... approaching...

“All for nothing!”

Ladd, weaponless, looked down at Gig, whose nose was completely punched in. “Speaking of rude, it’s bad manners to get punched when you’re attacking!”

The small Caucasian man and Dragon both cursed under their breath. “You asshole....” “You....”

Ladd just gave a yawn as is bored.

“So, what is it that you wanna say?”

“Who the hell are you? We –”

“Oh, shaddup.” Ladd cut Dragon off and continued casually, as if chatting to friends. “Okay, I’m totally not interested in who you are or what you’re made of. No interest – hence shut up. You may have godlike powers and can blow my head off just by cursing, but shut up anyways.”

As he spoke, Ladd seemed to have left himself open, and the two assassins both leapt forwards.

The small man dived for the rifle on the floor, and Dragon aimed with bared teeth for Ladd’s throat like a rabid dog.

“Whether you want to discuss your past, your present, your modus operandi, your hostility towards me, you self-satisfaction, incantations, legends –”

Ladd kept talking but moved without missing a beat, moved brutally.

As if the two assassins had been enchanted by Ladd’s words, they seemed to slow. Ladd swung a right towards Dragon. Dragon’s expression looked like he was saying “Bring it on!” and opened his mouth at Ladd’s approaching hand.

His mouth was opened so wide that his jaw unhinged behind his ear. Like a hound, he snapped his mouth shut just short of swallowing Ladd’s fist.

The bones in Ladd’s hand were crushed under this enormous pressure, but Ladd didn’t seem to mind at all.

They seemed locked unmoving in this pose for a moment, then a crazed smile appeared on Ladd’s face.

He twisted his torso and legs as if stretching, and then let out all the power he was building up.

“--- tell me next time I kill you.”

The small man had managed to get the rifle, but as he heard Ladd’s challenge, he saw a shadow descend upon him.

It was Dragon’s face, wide-eyed with surprise.

Ladd was using Dragon, who had his teeth clamped over Ladd’s fist, as a boxing glove. Ladd’s full force fell on the small man’s head.

“...? That’s it?”

After Ladd took out the four Felix Walkens, a strange silence gripped the room.

Huey, who had been looking on quietly from the beginning, now had a question. “Hmm...the Felix Walken assassin team, so easily defeated by one man? Quiet exceptional.”

Ladd saw Huey watching him and balled his bloody hand into a fist and gave another carnivorous grin. “What’re you muttering about there? Practicing how to plead for your life?”

Huey only smiled at this. “Oh, I’m just rather interested in you.”

In response to Huey’s smile, Ladd’s smile got even wider.

Firo, completely left out, stood with his back to the wall where he could see both men.

Huey spoke up again. “You – you were comparing yourself to the ticking crocodile.”

“Yup, that’s what I said.”

“In the Peter Pan story, Peter Pan represents the state of childhood – mindless of others’ intentions, pure, and cruel; and Captain Hook presents adulthood, and a certain kind of evil. If so, what about the crocodile? Where do you stand?”

“Absolute power, and a killing instinct that has nothing to do with good or evil. Insatiable appetite. Unpredictable disaster.”

“...”

“I’m a killer, so I enjoy slaughter. If heaven and hell exist, yeah, I’m going straight to hell. But I don’t have much to do with good or evil. Conflict can have nothing to do with good and evil, and only the victim can decide what it’s going to be. I’m just following my desires – I guess I’m just doing what I like to do. That’s it. So if you supposedly can’t be killed, and if I can kill you, that’ll satisfy me. That’s it.”

“I thought you were just a brute, but now it seems you actually have an inner poet.”

“Oh come on, don’t call me a poet. Don’t you think that’s an insult to poets?” Ladd made a fist again and his face was hard and cruel. “I will now make you pay for that insult.”

“But...don’t you think that your killing intent ought to be...dispersed?”

“Huh?”

“Didn’t you say that you’re interested in killing immortals? You want to kill me because I’m an immortal.” Huey paused and smiled coldly. “In that case, that Firo Prochainezo over there is also an immortal.”

--- That bastard!!

At this turn of events, Firo was the most surprised of all.

Firo had been staying out of it so far, but now he was dragged into their standoff. It was probably part of Huey’s plan to turn Ladd’s attention away from himself and also get Firo on his own side. Firo glared at Huey with teeth clenched in anger, then sighed and looked towards Ladd.

“...is that true, Firo Prochainezo?”

In answer, Firo walked slowly towards Huey and stopped behind him. Then he put his finger in his mouth and bit down hard.

Pain was immediate. The taste of blood filled his mouth and blood began dripping towards the floor. But it was over in a moment. The dripping blood and the taste of blood were gone – it seeped back into his finger as if time was turning back.

It was the first time that Ladd had seen an immortal's wound heal, but his only reaction was that his eyes got a little wider. There was an undecipherable expression in his eyes.

"Hey, sorry about this." Firo felt bad about deceiving Ladd, who was like a friend now. I was better to have nothing to do with him as soon as possible. He looked at the little girl lying in the corner, and felt dazed.

On the other hand, Ladd was expressionless.

"...Haha."

He laughed suddenly, and then his laughter grew louder and louder.

"Ahahahahaha! Really? Really really? Is that right! Ah, thanks, Firo. You just taught me something real valuable."

--- Huh? What did I say?

Firo was confused, but Ladd just applauded.

"Didn't I tell you that the people I want to kill are ones who think they're invincible? Didn't I? But you're not like those jerks."

"So...what's your point...?"

"Ah, Firo, even though you're an immortal, you're still afraid of death. I can see it from your eyes. Just for a moment, I saw that you were on guard to this Huey Laforet here. Because you know you can die...and I understood."

And then Ladd spoke his grand conclusion.

"You immortals – there's a way you can die too, right?"

"...!?"

"Oh, it's okay...you can both come at me and I'll take you on. Then I'll definitely question you thoroughly about how you can die..." Ladd adopted a boxing stance and bounced on the balls of his feet as if he wanted to start a match right there and then. "If you got any last words, I'll give you some time."

Huey twisted his head to look at Firo. "Then...as things are, what are you going to do?" He didn't sound the slightest bit worried.

Firo gave a deep sigh. When he spoke, his voice was forceful. "Say, Huey Laforet."

"I sense a change. What is it?"

"You asked me about Szilard's memories, and the other alchemists' memories, and whether they would affect me or not, right?"

This seemed off topic, and Huey looked at Firo with puzzlement, but didn't stop him from going on. He just pricked up his ears with interest.

“I’m not worried about it anymore. I’m not worried, as long as I don’t suddenly turn into that old geezer and harm Ennis and my friends.”

“...”

“It doesn’t matter to me anymore. As long as the world around me is at peace, it doesn’t matter who I am – even if I’m only part of someone else’s dream.”

---...I think I’ve argued this point with Claire many times before.

“Why do you speak of this now?” Huey asked.

Firo expected this question and just smiled slightly. “Well, I don’t know how this will turn out. So I wanted to say that before we part.”

(New York Police Department)

Three men with varying expressions sat in the police station waiting room.

The three investigators had been hauled over to give an account of the bombing, and they had just been let go. Before the issue was resolved down and Victor’s superiors discussed this incident and what was to be done, none of them were allowed to leave New York.

Victor glared at the ceiling with frustration.

“In the end, Huey still played us. It looks like that Firo’s been either devoured or turned over to his side.”

Edward glanced at his pessimistic superior. “I’m not sure.”

“What do you mean? And Edward, before the suicide bomber came, you were going to say something.”

Edward thought about the question for a moment, and how Victor had said that he could be discounted, and said, “This is just my opinion, Sir, but that kid Firo, he didn’t get this far just on luck.”

“...all right, so he might still be useful, and we still have some hope?”

“No, I don’t think we need to wait any longer.”

Victor frowned. “What are you trying to say?”

“I just mean that we shouldn’t underestimate him.” Edward recalled how Firo had climbed from an orphan up to a young capo, and said stonily, “We probably shouldn’t hope for much – instead we should be on guard.”

“In the end, he’s still a criminal...”



(Huey's cell, Alcatraz)

"By the way, there is another thing --"

"Yes?" Huey didn't seem to have been bothered by either Ladd's murderousness or Firo's words.

"The...just now, the four Felix Walken people who attacked you."

"Yes?" Huey was still sitting quietly in his chair, and looking at Ladd, whose face was still filled with malice.

Suddenly, he heard a "CHING--" sound behind him.

"...?"

In the same instant, he felt a cold stab in his back.

.....?

The cold suddenly became scorching hot, then turned into a violent pain that assaulted his head. Tremors passed through his body, but then Huey felt the pain vanish.

At the same time, he realized that he could no longer move his arms and legs.

Huey toppled forwards, his eyes wide. He could see Ladd across from him and knew he had nothing to do with this.

As he collapsed onto the floor, Huey heard Firo's cold voice.

"Actually...it's five people."

Firo reached his right hand towards Huey's head, to scan his consciousness.

Huey's face was turned sideways and he could only see shadows, but quiet thoughts spiralled in his mind.

--- This was completely out of my reckoning.

--- Even though I wanted to grasp every aspect of this operation in my hands, sometimes these unexpected elements would still materialize before me.

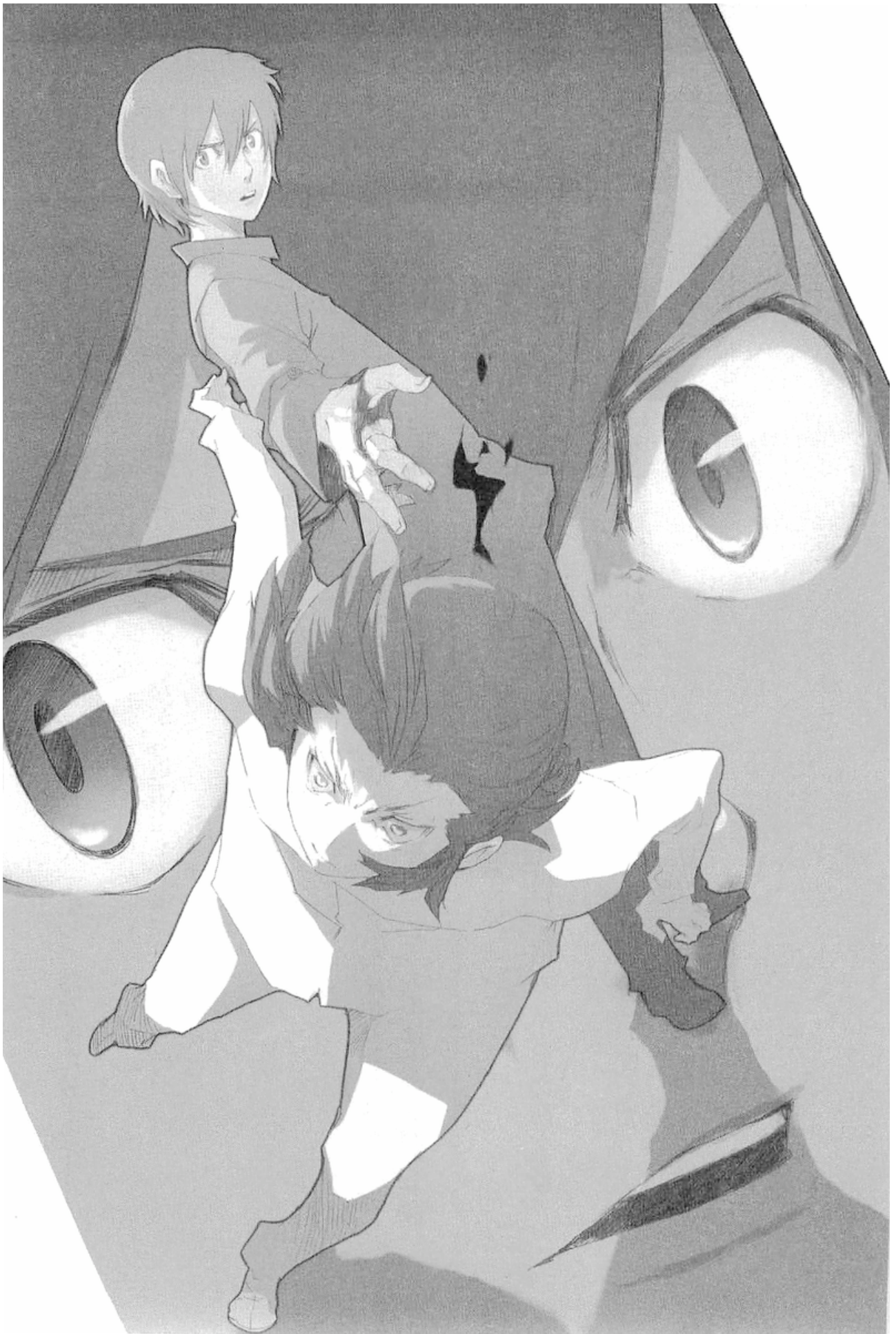
As his breathing became more and more laboured and his consciousness rapidly faded, he remembered his old friend and couldn't help letting a small, rueful smile cross his features.

--- Ah, Elmer, you were right.

--- That's what makes the world interesting.

The room was filled with a silent loneliness.

The child lying in the corner suddenly began to move.



“Hmmm....! Hmmm...!”

As before, Leeza opened her eyes and jumped up immediately upon gaining consciousness.

How long was she out for? She had the answer the moment this question appeared in her mind.

“...it was one hour and twenty-seven minutes!” She had no clock or watch, but she could still feel the time lapse.

“Papa...!”

She realized that she was in her father’s solitary cell and scanned the surroundings.

First, she detected that the door was open, and that the familiar warden was lying on the floor outside.

But then these things became trivial in comparison when she saw the fallen figure in white. Her heart gave a violent shudder.

“Papa!”

She leapt up and ran towards him.

There was a dagger in the back of his neck. It looked as if his spinal cord had been completely sliced through.

“Ah...AHHHHHHH!”

She cried and grabbed the dagger and pulled.

The sound of the dagger coming loose of Huey’s flesh and bones was sickening, and then the dagger was out. Blood oozed out and then retreated back into Huey’s neck.

--- Thank god! He’s still alive!

Even though she knew, rationally, that Huey was an immortal, the dagger still frightened her.

“Hm...”

“Papa! Papa! Get up! Get up!”

Huey rose slowly. “Ah...Leeza...? Where is everyone?”

Leeza started and looked around in surprise. Other than the collapsed warden, everyone else was gone.

“It’s okay! They’re gone! All gone!”

“Really...I really thought he would devour me.”

Huey checked his physical state as he gradually stood. Suddenly he detected something wrong, and turned to look at Leeza.

“Strange...I can’t seem to see out of my left eye...Leeza, can you take a look?”

If his guess was right, this result was totally unexpected – so he wanted his daughter to confirm it. He also wanted to know how she would react to it, since she saw himself as a normal human being.

“P...Papa?”

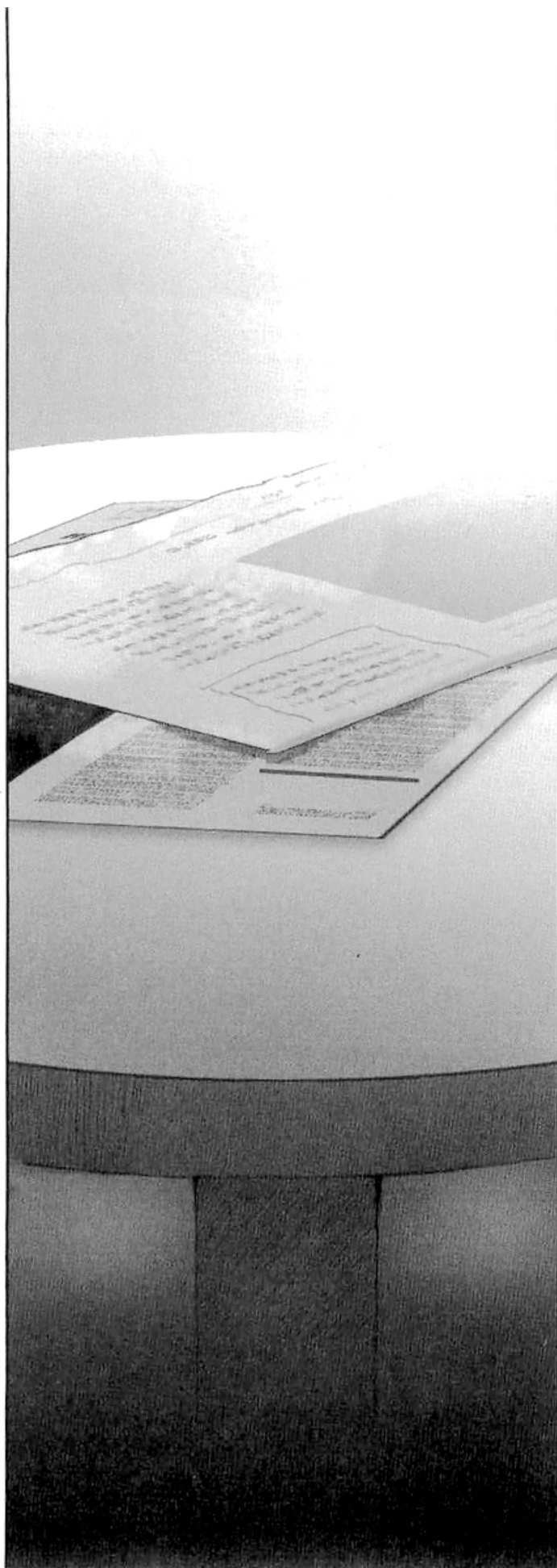
Leeza, full of apprehension, flipped Huey’s left eyelid. Underneath was a crimson hole.

His eye was gone.

Leeza’s eyes met the gaping hole she screamed. Huey put everything else aside and began to unimpassionedly make note of her reaction.

He thought about what he had just done, and concluded that he was truly an awful person.

Might as well cheerfully continue his experiment.



接統章

情報屋にて

## Connecting Chapter : At the Press

(Daily Days Office, New York)

Well, let's stop here then.

It's like down payment.

Didn't I say so?

I was present for some of these events, and for some others, I wasn't.

The story I told so far centres around the prison, but there are things I haven't mentioned.

Those events unfolded on another stage – and they're closely linked to what happened in Chicago. The story won't be complete without taking those events into account too.

I'll leave those until after you give me your intel in return.

I hope you understand.

To understand this whole affair, you need to know what happened in Chicago.

You've probably already guessed how Huey keeps in touch with the outside world, but:

What's Graham Specter really like?

How did Ladd Russo unlock the chains around his feet?

Why did Firo take Huey's left eye?

What happened to Ladd and Firo afterwards?

Ah, yes, there are many such unanswered questions, so without knowing what happened in Chicago, it would be impossible to piece things together.

Please excuse me. To tell the truth, I actually do want to tell you, but I also want information about the events I don't know about and the situations I don't know about.

And then bring in what our agents know, and the information that even you don't know, and then work everything out, piece everything together into a whole.

So from a certain point of view...Master Huey and I are really birds of a feather.

...Oh, is it time for you to go?

Well, I guess that's it for today.

I might be someone else tomorrow, or I might not be here at all.

That might sound peculiar, but if you see Vice President Saint Germain, you'll understand everything.



Oh, yes. As for me, I'll be keeping an eye on things as they unfold. I can't deny that more things demand our attention than the average person.

That's our duty, Hilton's and mine. The Twins, and we cannot cease in our duty.

Since it's our duty, we want payment for our work.

Well then, I hope we will maintain our good working relationship, Mr. information broker.

Please believe me – all intelligence, good or ill, will help our world become complete.



余章

刑務所を出たよ！

## Extra Chapter : Released!

(Alcatraz, San Francisco)

“Congratulations, you’re being released today.”

At Missouri’s words, Isaac smiled a little embarrassedly. “Ah, you know, I feel sorta bad that you’re always taking such good care of me.”

“...you’re one of three people for whom I personally processed entry and release procedures. The other two only had their entry procedures done, but they haven’t been let out yet.”

“That’s awesome! I’m the only one! Well, I suppose I’m not that awesome for being caught and sent to jail...it’s the Chief Warden who’s awesome!”

Missouri seemed to be getting somewhat mixed up by what Isaac was saying. “Well...I’m not the Chief Warden...but yes...Warden Johnston really is fantastic...and it’s rare for inmates to leave after so short a time, other than as dead bodies...of course, in prison you have been compensating for the crimes you’ve committed, but whether you continue to make up for them after you rejoin society is the most important thing. From now on, you must turn over a new leaf – for society, for America, and for the ones you love.”

“Right! I’ll do my best!”

Missouri sighed at Isaac’s childlike enthusiasm, then reached into his breast pocket and took out an envelope.

“Um...I never thought I’d say this, but here is your salary for this month’s labour. It’s yours by right. There’s also a little from me, as send-off gift.”

Isaac took the envelope, smiled, and thanked Missouri for the third time. “Woo, thanks! This makes me real happy, Mr. Chief Warden!”

“Oh Isaac, didn’t I already say that I wasn’t...?”

“Okay, so you’re an even bigger boss?”

“.....Oh, never mind. Well, I suppose that has a nice ring to it.”

Isaac left the ruefully smiling Missouri behind him and left the office. He got off the island the same way as he arrived, under guard.

The island view was something he’d seem many times already, but the cliffs were bathed in the setting sun, and –

“Beautiful.”

He remembered his past, everything that happened until now, but even the desire for freedom couldn’t compare with the desire to see Miria again.

“Oh man, what a headache. All this won’t even get me to New York.”

He had to go through all sorts of procedures at the office before he could really go. Normally, prisoners of Alcatraz had to be transferred to another prison for a period of time, but since Isaac wasn't convicted under the ordinary procedures, he was let go right away.

Originally, he was supposed to have a meeting with Victor, but because there was trouble in New York, Isaac met with the man who was supposed to be Victor's superior.

The city was filled with news of what happened in Chicago, but Isaac paid it no attention.

When he got back the clothes that he was wearing on the day he was arrested, he added the money in his bag to what he had just received, and set off for the train station.

He wanted nothing but to see Miria as early as possible.

But no matter which route he took, it wasn't enough for him to take the transcontinental train back to New York. Prison wages were meagre, and he had only been working for a month. Even with what Missouri gave him, he would only get halfway.

As things stood, a thought occurred to Isaac that he should rob a bad guy one last time. But then he remembered what Missouri said about turning over a new leaf for the people he loved and so forth, and stopped himself.

"If they catch me, it might even be a death sentence this time..."

Isaac mulled things over a while longer, and finally settled on making a phone call.

Through the operator, and to the Alveare.

Saina answered the phone, then passed it to Ronnie, and then Isaac called the location that Ronnie had directed him to.

This time the operator put him through to a familiar voice – the voice of a young man with a tattoo on his face.

This is great, Jacuzzi cried. And then –

The voice of the one he most missed.

The voice he most wanted to hear.

The voice was filled with tears and filled with joy, and Isaac felt a smile appear on his face.

He had been worried because he didn't quite know what to say and where to begin. But suddenly, he remembered something and burst out, "I'm sorry, Miria! My wallet was actually in my pocket."

It wasn't because he couldn't think of anything to say, and it wasn't just a perfunctory apology. Isaac simply felt that he must apologize. But Miria's voice came already from the other end of the line. "Oh, no worries!"

Isaac felt much better at this. But then he had to raise a topic he didn't really want to raise.

"Actually, I don't have enough money over here...I don't want to bother you, Miria, but can you find my savings tin and get my train money and send it over?"

"-----!"





シカゴ  
バッカーノ! 1934『娑婆編』へ——

Miria's voice was filled with determination to go meet him. But Isaac was worried that it might be too hard for her to come so far, and decided that it would be better if he travelled part of the way himself.

He scanned the train time table and the cost of tickets, and recognized a stop that he had passed through before.

It was where he and Miria had dressed up as baseball stars and totally blew the local crime family.

"So...what about Chicago? I can at least make it there." With Miria's energetic voice spurring him on, he began to envision his return journey. "All right, Chicago it is. I'll be catching the train soon. Hey, where should we meet?"

He wrote down the time and place, and felt his heart fill with hope for tomorrow.

The sun was in the west now, and hope was in the east.

Isaac, filled with a sense of freedom, decidedly said one sentence into the phone.

There was nothing else to think about except meeting Miria again. This single-minded energy was in his voice, and it gave her peace of mind.

"All right! See you in Chicago!"





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Alice In Jails

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